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THE YELLOW BERYL

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NEW
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THE YELLOW BERYL;

OR,

PATSY BRINGS A HIGH ROLLER TO BOOK.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE "PIMPLE" CUTS A WIDE SWATH.

Joseph came, with his usual quiet step, into Nick Carter's study, which at present is situated at the back of the famous detective's town residence. Had not Nick known his man so well he would never have suspected that Joseph had come upon any particular errand, for he did not speak to his master, or come near him.

Nick was busy with a lot of papers at his desk—or appeared to be—and it was a rule that Joseph was not to disturb him under any circumstances until the detective gave him permission. Nick Carter believed thoroughly in a man's concentrating his mind upon the business immediately in hand. Such concentration had made him the successful trapper of criminals and solver of mysteries that he was.

Joseph glanced now and then at his master, and saw no opportunity of breaking in. He fiddled with the card in his hand, walked to the other side of the room and arranged a scarf on a small table, and even brought Nick's cigar-box from the small buffet and put it within reach of the detective's hand. He coughed once apologetically. Then he went to the door, listened a moment, and closed it softly again.

Suddenly the detective chuckled.

"Joseph!" he said, "you may tell Mr. Parr to come up."

The valet looked around, startled for the instant.

"I—I—— Did I speak, Mr. Carter?"

"No, you did not, Joseph. *I* was the one who spoke," said the detective, smiling.

"But—er—— You know that Mr. Cleveland Parr is waiting to see you, sir?"

"Of course, Joseph. Didn't I tell you that you might show him up?"

"Ah! You were expecting him, Mr. Carter?" said the valet, with some relief in his tone, as he moved toward the door.

Nick laughed again.

"No, Joseph. You are mistaken. Mr. Parr was far from my thoughts, and I had no reason to expect him here to-night—or at any other particular time."

"I don't understand, sir," stammered the valet, in a voice that betrayed his great desire *to* understand the mystery of Nick's discovery.

"I confess, Joseph, I was not so busy as I seemed when you came into the room," said the detective pleasantly.

"No, sir?"

"No. You obey orders well, Joseph. You thought I was deeply engaged. Therefore you did nothing to disturb me. But your mind was on your errand and involuntarily you did several things which led me to make the statement that I did at first."

"That I might bring Mr. Parr up?"

"Yes."

"I don't really understand you, sir," declared the valet, amazed. "What did I do?"

"In the first place, I knew I was to have a visitor, and that it was somebody who had been here before, or, at least, somebody whom you knew positively I would not refuse to see."

"Indeed, sir?" exclaimed Joseph.

"Yes. How? Why, looking about the room you saw little things out of place. You are a careful man, Joseph. You have almost the entire charge of my study yourself. You keep it as neat as can be expected of the workshop of a busy man.

"You saw the scarf yonder disturbed; you fixed it. You set yonder chair straight in its place. In your mind was the fact that a visitor was coming and you wished the room to be spick and span."

"That's so, sir! It's very true," cried Joseph, his amazement by no means decreasing.

"So, Joseph," said the detective easily, reaching for a cigar and snipping off the end, "I saw I was to have a guest. That guest was a gentleman, for you put my cigars within reach. And this box, I saw, is marked 'Claro.' My visitor was to be a man who smokes a mild cigar, and who has smoked my cigars before. You have a good memory, Joseph. You *did* remember that Mr. Parr found my usual smoke too strong for his taste, and that I called for the milder article when he was here?"

"Why, yes, sir! I remember it," said Joseph. "But other people prefer mild cigars, too, Mr. Carter. Other guests of yours, I mean."

"True. There is another point, however. All this time you have been carrying that card of Mr. Parr's between your thumb and finger."

"Yes, sir," admitted Joseph, putting the visiting-card before the detective, now that he was reminded of it.

"Very good. Mr. Parr, being, as he is, the secretary of a very rich man and moving in good society, is too well bred to have anything bizarre in the line of visiting-cards. And Mrs. Grundy has established that a card of just this size and quality should serve all men as visiting-cards. There is usually no more individuality to a pasteboard like this than there is to a spike-tailed coat.

"However, I chanced to notice when Mr. Parr was here before that he sent in a card that was just a shade off color. His engraver had got hold of a very nice card, and a card that, flat upon the table, looks to be a dead white. But held between the eye and the light it shows a faint pinkish shade.

"I chanced to see the light through that card you held, and it furnished the culminating clue to the identity of my visitor. The fact that he was one I would positively receive narrowed the quest some, you see; the selection of the cigars showed me fewer possibilities of making a mistake; and the card told the rest of the story. Very simple, Joseph—very simple. And now you may, as I said before, show Mr. Cleveland Parr up-stairs."

Cleveland Parr, the secretary of the millionaire Burton Strusse, and who had been closely associated with Nick Carter in the detective's investigation of the strange death and burial of a mysterious "Arthur Towne," who had been engaged to Mr. Strusse's ward, Sallie O'Neil,* came hastily into the room as though his wait below had fanned his impatience into a flame.

"Mr. Carter!" he exclaimed, coming to take the detective's hand. "I feared you were engaged."

"Fortunately, no. I say fortunately for two reasons. I'm always glad to see you, Parr; and you evidently have some special reason for desiring to see me this evening."

"Thank you for the compliment, sir, and I admit your final supposition to be the correct one. I *do* want to see you especially."

"You see me, Cleveland," laughed Nick Carter, waving his hand toward the cigar-box. "Have a smoke and tell me what you want. Miss Sallie isn't in any further trouble, is she?"

"Miss Sallie is in deep sorrow, Mr. Carter," returned Cleveland Parr, with gravity; for he was not informed of the fact that the heiress' guardian had been the prime mover in the "Arthur Towne" plot, and that Miss Sallie was now mourning the death of a lover who had never really existed!

For the sake of retaining control of Sallie O'Neil's great property—which had been put in his care until she was twenty-five, or until she married—Burton Strusse had posed in the guise of "Arthur Towne," an athletic man whom Miss Sallie believed had saved her from death by drowning, had won the imaginative young girl's heart by letter, and just before he was to appear and claim her as his bride, he suddenly died and was buried by his only known friend, "John Cox"—and then this friend disappeared.

Nick Carter had learned the full perfidy of the millionaire guardian of Miss O'Neil; but he realized that to betray Strusse to the girl would merely inflict a double wound, and would make desperate trouble in the family. Therefore the detective had locked this secret he had discovered regarding the director of the Wood Pulp Trust away in his mind, as he had secreted so many other private histories, choosing of two evils the lesser.

Therefore, when Cleveland Parr, who was in Sallie

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 574.

O'Neil's confidence, and evidently admired the heiress greatly, said that the girl was still mouring the death of the lover who had never really had an existence, Nick Carter simply nodded acquiescence and made no comment.

"It seems a pity, Mr. Carter, that nothing more satisfactory came of your investigations regarding the death of Arthur Towne," pursued Parr. "I think that if Miss Sallie had been enabled to really know where he was buried——"

"And that she never will know," interrupted Carter emphatically. "Time heals every wound, Mr. Parr. Miss Sallie may be more faithful to her ideals than most girls—we'll grant that; nevertheless, she will find some healing for her sorrow."

"Do—do you think so?" queried the secretary, and his tone and look made Nick Carter wag his head and mutter to himself.

"You didn't come here to tell me about Miss Sallie—though I'm glad to hear from her?" he said aloud.

"You are right, Mr. Carter. But I came from Miss Sallie, nevertheless."

"Ah! And what is it now?"

"Nothing to do with her at all, sir."

"Indeed?"

"But she is worried about Harold."

"Eh? Harold Strusse? That pimple on the face of nature? For pity's sake! What's the matter with the fellow?"

"Why, I'm free to confess, Mr. Carter, I have no love for him myself——"

"And has Miss Sallie—after all?"

"No, no! We can safely assume that that is over and done for. But remember that they have been brought up together, and Miss Sallie feels about Harold as she would about a younger brother."

"Well, what's the matter with Harold?"

"Why, to tell the truth, Mr. Carter, I should say that, for a boy, he is cutting a pretty wide swath!" declared Cleveland Parr.

"Humph! I thought his father had cut him down to a beggarly allowance, and made him go to work."

"He did."

"But he's weakened?"

"The old gentleman?"

"Yes; Strusse, senior."

"You don't know him if you think that, Mr. Carter," said Parr, smiling and shaking his head.

"No?"

"No, indeed! He has said that Harold must make a decent showing for himself before he handles any more money of *his*."

"Ah!" ejaculated Carter, looking questioningly at his visitor. "Who is furnishing the money for the boy's present fling, then?"

"That is exactly what is worrying Miss Sallie, sir."

"Oh, it is!"

"Yes, Mr. Carter. Unbeknown to his father, Harold is spending money more freely than ever before. He is out every night. I was curious enough myself to trace his movements two evenings. He is becoming well known in the all-night district, and is gathering about him the old crowd of leeches that he used to have before his father cut him off so short."

"He's playing the goat on Broadway again, is he?" demanded Nick Carter.

"The goat?"

"That is the man who pays for the gang. And I presume that Harold is paying?"

"Indeed he is!"

"And with real money?"

"I'm afraid that no other kind is accepted by the restaurant-keepers and gamblers in the Tenderloin, sir."

"You're mighty right there, Cleveland. And you think he hasn't borrowed this money?"

"I'm afraid not—legitimately."

"Oh!"

"Who would lend to him?" asked Parr hastily.

"The Jews. On the strength of his being old Strusse's son."

'Mr. Strusse could cut him off without a penny. There is nothing that is really Harold's. His mother left no estate. And Mr. Strusse has, I know, advertised the fact broadly that he will pay no bills contracted by Harold. There isn't a prominent restauranteur in town that I haven't sent exactly that message to. And they won't let Harold into the big gambling-houses. Mr. Strusse goes himself to Banfields' and Honest John Skelly's. He drops a few thousand himself, but they would not let Harold past the doors."

"Humph! yet seemingly without assets he manages to make a glittering glimmer on the Great White Way—as Patsy would say?" laughed Nick. "And, speaking of Patsy, I think we'll have him in. He perhaps will be better able to help you in this matter than I, Cleveland."

As he spoke, Nick Carter had signaled on the push-button under his desk. The call was unmistakably for Patsy, and in half a minute that smiling young man entered the room.

CHAPTER II.

THE FEVERISH LIFE.

"Mr. Garvan, Mr. Parr," said the detective, introducing his assistant to the caller. "Patsy is one of my brightest young men. And he knows his New York—especially the White-Light District. Just repeat your story—and don't forget any details you may have overlooked in telling me," and Nick Carter smiled.

"Really, Mr. Carter! I believe I have not intentionally suppressed anything——"

"But I've heard very little yet," suggested Nick. "Let's have it all."

"Very well, sir."

"Mr. Parr is secretary to Mr. Burton Strusse, the wood-pulp magnate," explained Nick to Patsy. "And Mr. Strusse is the guardian of Miss Sallie O'Neil, only daughter of the late General Jones O'Neil."

The introduction was sufficient. Patsy was already familiar with the investigation his chief had made in behalf of Miss O'Neil regarding the mysterious "Arthur Towne." He nodded his appreciation of these facts, and both detectives waited on Mr. Cleveland Parr's pleasure.

"As I have already told Mr. Carter," said the secretary, a little diffidently, "it is Miss O'Neil who has sent me here again, not Mr. Strusse."

Both Patsy and his chief could have been sure of that. Mr. Burton Strusse was not in love with Nick Carter, and had already told him so.

"Mr. Strusse knows nothing about these late developments regarding Harold."

"No?" queried Nick, nodding.

"To tell the truth, he pays very little attention to his son. When Harold gets in too deep a mess to pull himself out, his father has to come to the rescue."

"Then he *does* have some interest still in the young man?"

"I don't know that he would save him again. He has been very angry with Harold."

"Humph! Blood is thicker than water," commented Patsy. "Or, so I've always heard."

"I think Mr. Strusse thinks more of Ben Daggart than he does of Harold," said Parr.

"That's his nephew," explained Nick to his young assistant.

"And a fine young man," added Parr warmly. "I fear that Mr. Carter still holds some suspicion regarding Mr. Ben, in connection with the strange disappearance of Mr. Towne. But I am sure that he had nothing to do with that matter."

"It speaks well that you stand up for Mr. Daggart," said Nick, a little dryly. "He is quite fond of Miss O'Neil, too, isn't he?"

"We're all fond of her," said Cleveland Parr shortly.

"So I've heard you say before," drawled the detective. "But I interrupt."

"Well!" pursued the visitor. "Mr. Strusse pays very little attention to Harold, saving when he *does* get into trouble. He has never forgiven him for acting so that Miss Sallie broke her engagement with him. You understand?"

"Quite," admitted Nick Carter, nodding.

"And Mr. Strusse has threatened to turn Harold out of the house if he is caught in a mess again."

"Humph!"

"He'd do it, sir," said Parr.

"A nice daddy," commented Patsy.

"Rather say a nice son," added Nick. "Well, Mr. Parr, get down to cases. What's the trouble with the 'pimple' now?"

"As I previously informed you, sir, Mr. Harold seems to be spending a lot of money."

"And his salary is—what?"

"Three dollars a week," and Cleveland Parr smiled grimly.

"Whew! And what does his father give him?"

"Fifty a month."

"Well, a fellow can do a good deal on that," said Patsy, wagging his head.

"Not such a fellow as Harold Strusse—eh, Mr. Parr?" chuckled the detective.

"I should say not, sir! Until his father cut him down he was in the habit of spending thousands every month."

It was Patsy's turn to whistle.

"And what's he doing now?" he asked.

"He is spending more in the Tenderloin than ever. I know that to be a fact."

"He's shaking somebody down, then," declared Patsy. "He has to have real money to cut a wide swath on Broadway."

"That is what Mr. Carter and I were saying, Mr. Garvan," admitted Cleveland Parr.

"What kind of a position is this Harold has—at the munificent salary of three per?" asked Nick Carter, with some interest.

"He's in the law office of Gresham, Harrity & Polk."

"Humph! I know them well."

"And, sir, it is no position of responsibility he holds."

"I should think not!"

"He handles no money."

"Only his three iron men per week, eh?" laughed Patsy.

"And his father's check which I write for him on the first of the month."

"H'm! He doesn't raise 'em, does he?" queried Nick Carter reflectively.

Cleveland Parr actually blushed.

"I—I have taken pains to go to the bank and get the canceled check for the last month. It is all right," he said.

"You've done a little investigating on your own hook, then?" queried Nick Carter.

"Oh, sir! don't you see that we—that is, that Miss Sallie—hopes to shield the boy? She has some interest in him. How could she fail to have, as she has been brought up under his father's roof? And really, before Harold got to running around and spending so much

money, he was not a bad boy. His father's carelessness in letting him have his own head and all the money he wanted, in the first place, started the boy wrong. He could not stand it."

"Few boys can," muttered Carter.

"So his father forced him to go to work. And he got this position with Gresham, Harrity & Polk for Harold, and made him take it. The boy is a junior clerk, with a chance to study law if he will. And he positively has the handling of no money. So, when Miss Sallie found that he was living far beyond his means——"

"She didn't lend to him herself, then?"

"Mr. Strusse forbade her. And Mr. Daggart wouldn't."

"Did he have any jewelry?"

"Not much. And I miss nothing. I cannot imagine how he has obtained money enough to—to——"

"To pursue the feverish life, eh?" laughed Patsy. Then the young fellow turned to Nick. "Any orders for me, sir?" he asked.

"Why—no. Follow your own lead, Patsy," said the detective. "I suppose you will look this young spendthrift up?"

"Mr. Parr and I will sample a little of the feverish life ourselves," said Patsy, smiling broadly. "I'd fancy seeing this young Strusse playing the goat. I might get a line on some of the blood-suckers that are leeching on him, and so learn the foundation of his fortune."

"Very good, Patsy. Mr. Parr knows some of Harold's haunts, I have no doubt?"

"Ye-es. But would it be best for me to appear in this matter, Mr. Carter?"

"How's that?"

"Would not my being in the places along Broadway, which Harold knows I never enter of my own free will, warn him that he is being watched?"

"Good point, that," admitted the detective.

"I tell you what, Mr. Parr," said Patsy. "Come along with me this evening, and show me the joints Harold is likely to show up in. When we find him, and you point him out to me, as far as I'm concerned, you can fade away as soon as you like."

Agreeing to this, and after a few whispered instructions from his chief, Patsy and Parr sallied forth to taste what Patsy had termed "the feverish life" of the White-light District.

Patsy knew the all-night joints along Broadway patronized by the reckless crew that believe life as they see it after dark in the Tenderloin is "the real thing." He knew these places as well as he knew the East Side and the poor and criminal sections of all New York. He merely needed Parr along to point out Harold Strusse to him. When that was done, Patsy could lay his own trap for the high-roller.

CHAPTER III.

THE GIRL WHO WAS OUT OF PLACE.

"Incandescent Alley" is a mighty nice-looking place after dark, and there is plenty of clean, innocent amusement to be had on it; but when the fever gets in a man's blood, and he sees other men spending fortunes as though bank-bills grew on bushes in the back yard, unless he chances to have a clean and sound brain, he is likely to fall into excesses himself.

There is a considerable number of Tenderloin "rounders"—book-makers, gamblers, and the like—who, when they make a "ten-strike," steer for Broadway at once to spend it. You certainly get a run for your money on the Great White Way; but the headache, the dark-brown taste, and the gnawing canker of remorse after the money goes, is really a heavy price to pay for one's fling!

Cleveland Parr was, perhaps, a bit of a prig. Rather, such pleasures as the Tenderloin could offer had little charm for him. As for Patsy, he had been used to the reckless crew and the whole business all his life. It had no effect upon him one way or the other.

And as for Parr showing him any of the joints in which the scion of the house of Strusse spent his evenings—Patsy knew them all, and more. But he wanted to get a line on Harold himself, and be sure of identifying him.

So Patsy dragged Parr about a good bit and they went into a dozen rathskellers, saloons, cafés, billiard-parlors, and one or two music-halls of the baser sort.

They finally found the object of their search in a place on Tin-pan Alley—Twenty-eighth Street. All day long the block resounds to the clatter of pianos and graphophones. A dozen different professional singers are trying a dozen different "popular" ballads at once. There is a music-publishing firm in every other house.

At night the aspect of the block is entirely changed. Certain houses with the shutters of their upper windows tight-closed suddenly blossom out with electric signs, music is heard within, a row of cabs take their places along the curb, and "cappers" or "touts" for the various cheap entertainment-halls lurk along the sidewalk and solicit the promising-looking pedestrian.

In and out of these "Turkish smoking-parlors," "music-halls," "Greek gardens," or whatever they may be called, trip a throng of foolish creatures of either sex—most of them pitiably young! The glitter and tinsel of the places, the laughter and song and drink, all aid in the downfall of the votaries of Tin-pan Alley at night!

The place into which Patsy and his companion ventured was as baudy as any on the block. Its general color effect was green; but not a cool and soothing shade. Instead, with the gold-leaf and electric bulbs, the effect was both ghastly and glittering. There were mirrors set into the walls that gave the place the appearance of a

series of deep grottoes; but even the whirling electric fans could not keep the hall cool.

There were divans, and high-backed settees, and screens, and paper-palms and rubber-plants to shelter different corners. Everywhere were little round, weather-ed-oak tables, with the ever-present match-safe.

At the piano a young man in his shirt-sleeves executed rag-time with unflagging energy. Occasionally one of the waiters, blessed with an East Side tenor, or Hell's Kitchen baritone, stayed in his serving of customers with drink, and warbled some ditty about "home and mother," or "remember the girl you left behind, Jack"—those mawkishly sentimental ballads which are sure to bring tears to the eyes of a man who is half-drunk, and make him order more drink so as to drown his remorse—or the remembrance of the song!

Patsy, with a grin at Parr's disgusted face, led his companion in by a side door, and they took seats in a corner from which they could view the entire room, but be little observed themselves. As they entered, Parr had caught sight of Harold Strusse sitting at a table with several others well up in front, near the piano, and he had called Patsy's attention to the object of their search.

"Nice-looking boy," commented Patsy, eying the tall, rather pimply-faced young man, who was supposed to be the sole heir of the director of the Wood Pulp Trust. "And he's certainly got a nice-looking bunch with him—I don't think!"

"They are bleeding him, Mr. Garvan—they are bleeding him," declared Cleveland Parr.

"He's playing the goat as though he were used to it, that's a fact," admitted Patsy, as the waiter served a round of drinks to the five people at young Strusse's table, and included the piano-player, the waiter who had just sung, and himself, in the service, for all of which Harold Strusse paid him with a bank-bill.

A waiter came to the two young men and Patsy gave an order.

"A pink feather duster and an angel's wing, George," said Patsy, and then grinned again at Parr's puzzled face as the waiter departed to fill this mysterious order.

"Nothing but fancy drinks, or wine, goes in these places," said Patsy. "And they do get up some queer combinations of John Barleycorn to rack the stomachs of folks foolish enough to swallow them. But there's a cuspidor beside each table—and it's there for a purpose. If you're wise you don't swallow much of the stuff they sell here."

"Ugh! I should hope not," whispered Parr. "I have too much respect for my stomach."

"But I see that Harold boy is downing the stuff," remarked the young detective. "He can't last long at this gait."

"He has been home twice this week intoxicated already," declared Parr. "Once I helped him up to bed."

"He's a nice, interesting case—I don't think! A regular pillgarlic! And that's a nifty bunch he has there, particularly the one on his right," said Patsy.

"The man is an evil looker," ventured Parr.

"He is that. I know him. He's a pleasant companion for any mama's boy."

"You would scarcely call young Mr. Strusse that," said Parr, wagging his head.

"No. But he's certainly a soft-boiled, all right, all right. That fellow is an all-round crook. He's got a reputation as a second-story man; but his long suit is dusting the Rubes as they land at Forty-second Street——

"Oh! you're not on to my meaning? He meets the 'come-ons' for bigger confidence men. He hasn't the standing of Grand Central Pete, perhaps, but Mooney has helped to separate many a goat-whiskered Reuben from his hard-earned coin.

"And as for those girls—well, the least said, the soonest mended. I guess those two adventuresses, we'll call them, across the table from Harold are about as well known around these corners as the strong-arm men on the *Herald* building clocks. The other—gee! isn't she a peach?" ejaculated Patsy suddenly.

The third girl at the table had turned to glance carelessly over the room. They had not seen her face before.

She was slight and tastefully dressed; but her figure was well rounded and her carriage graceful. Her complexion was dark, with brilliant coloring behind the dusky hue of cheek and throat. She was, strangely enough, dependent upon no make-up for the brilliancy of her countenance.

Her lips were cherry-red, but were colored only by nature. Her eyes needed no treatment of belladonna to make them bright and alluring. Her eyebrows and lashes needed no pencil to accentuate their silkiness. And she was young—very, very young!

"It is awful," whispered Parr, turning his eyes away. "Mr. Garvan, can you excuse me? You do not need me further, do you? There is Harold Strusse, and I would much rather he did not see me. And, to tell you the truth, sir, this is altogether making me sick."

Patsy looked at him without smiling, and muttered:

"I don't know as I blame you. All this——"

"And that girl," interrupted Parr. "I can't help but saying to myself: 'Suppose she was your sister?'"

"All right. Good night," said Patsy shortly. And then he muttered, with his eyes fixed upon the girl's face, "And I ain't so sure but what's she's out of place at that. She doesn't look like she'd been born and bred to this, and that's a fact."

But Cleveland Parr did not hear this. He made his way to the door, keeping out of Harold Strusse's sight as he went.

CHAPTER IV.

PATSY BUTTS IN.

Nick Carter's bright young assistant was very well aware of the fact that many lonely, or ill-cared-for girls in this great city of New York are easily led into such vicious drinking-places as this.

But it is not usual that a modest, innocent-looking girl is found in such a haunt of vice; for it is plain what the place is like on the surface.

Yet this dark little beauty did not look like the other habitués of the place. She, at least, was not world-weary; her laugh rang true; and she was the life of the company gathered about the table presided over by Harold Strusse.

Patsy saw all this without appearing to pay the party more than ordinary attention. Being alone in the place, he was privileged to watch the others. Having tipped the waiter well, Patsy was left by himself.

He sat, however, so that he could watch the pretty girl's face in one of the mirrors, yet without attracting her attention, or the notice of any of her party.

She was well dressed—indeed, she was garishly dressed. Yet her dark and sprightly face and gay manner seemed to go well with her bright costume and the trinkets she wore.

There were several rings on her fingers, bracelets on both plump wrists, and at her throat, half-hidden in the lace of her gown, glowed a dull yellow stone which, from the first, had caught Patsy's eye. It was such an odd-looking brooch that it was bound to attract comment.

Now and then, when she raised her head and looked across at her companions, Patsy got a clearer look at the brooch. Its setting was of red-gold, and although he knew it must be of modern manufacture, it was made to look like an antique ornament.

Somewhere Patsy felt that he had seen it before. There couldn't be many such dull-yellow stones with just a glint of fire in their depths—a sulfur flame which flashed now and then when the wearer of the gem moved quickly. At least, it was not a common ornament.

Yet Patsy was convinced that he had seen the like before, and he cudgeled his wits well as he thought the matter over. To tell the truth, the girl and her strange brooch interested Patsy a whole lot more than did the fact that Harold Strusse had somehow copped a bunch of money "that wasn't his'n" and was spending it on such folks as Rio Mooney, the confidence man!

Mooney was a Brazilian—or had lived there a part of his crooked career. He was slight and dark, and his face was evil. Now that it was inflamed somewhat from the potations he had imbibed, he was a deal worse-looking than young Strusse.

The latter was merely foolish. But Rio Mooney was not a fit companion for any decent man, or girl. He chanced to be sitting beside the unfortunate young woman who seemed so out of place in such company, and once or twice the con man tried to place his hand familiarly on her arm, a liberty that she resented.

Patsy watched the byplay with interest—and growing anger. Of course, he well understood that a girl who would come to such a place as this, and remain in the company of such people as Rio Mooney and the two girls at the table, should have expected unseemly actions and was deserving of little sympathy.

Yet the girl appeared so innocent, her laughter rang so true, and what Patsy overheard of her conversation was so clean and decent that the observer was moved to believe—as at first sight—that she was quite out of place in this music-hall, and that there was some mystery about her presence here.

Patsy, as he expressed it secretly, found his hands "itching" to lay into Rio Mooney. The fellow's coarse grain showed more plainly every minute.

Of course, the managers of these music-halls see that there is no trouble, if possible; but more than one fight has been "pulled off" in such joints between half-drunken girls, using broken glass tumblers in their handkerchiefs for weapons. The waiters have been known to "beat up" a drunken man and rob him, too. And in one particular place of this kind in the neighborhood, not many years ago, a waiter killed and decapitated a patron, and through political influence came near getting away safely with the proceeds of the murder!

Therefore the waiters paid little attention to the party at Strusse's table when the members grew more noisy. Strusse himself was already silly drunk. Mooney was evidently an ugly one in his cups.

Patsy saw that she was drinking but little. She merely sipped a trifle from each glass of insidious poison that

was placed before her. But the others were in so drunken a state now that they did not notice her defection.

She grew more quiet, too. What had evidently been light-hearted fun for her at first was now, plainly, becoming irksome—if, indeed, she was not frightened. The two bold girls with her had forgotten such manners as they ever owned. One was singing loudly a popular song that the blacksmith at the piano was hammering out, while the other reclined her head upon Harold Strusse's shoulder.

"I'm going!" Patsy heard the pretty girl announce, and she started to rise from her seat. "We're drinking too much. You promised you wouldn't if I came——"

"Aw, sit down!" interrupted Rio Mooney suddenly.

He threw his arm about the girl and dragged her back.

"Stop! Let me alone!" she exclaimed under her breath, striving to release herself.

But Mooney only laughed, and held her the tighter.

"Come now! play nice," he drawled.

Her little gloved hand slapped him squarely across his leering lips. Again it was lifted and the palm "spanged" upon the confidence man's ear.

Rio Mooney let out a bellow of rage, and sprang up, swearing like a trooper. The girl had wriggled out of his grasp. He reached one clutching hand for her, while his other fist was doubled and swung brutally at her face.

The girl did not see the blow coming. She had sprung away from him and now spoke angrily to Harold Strusse.

"Harold! do you mean to see me insulted?" she cried. "You promised to take care of me if I came with you here."

But Strusse only looked up with a silly grin and mumbled something about "Mooney bein' a good feller!"

And that particular "good feller" would have sent a smashing blow into the pretty face of the helpless girl had not Patsy sprung over his table, with the agility of a trained acrobat, and seized the descending fist.

Patsy, as well as Nick Carter, had learned something of ju-jutsu from Ten-Ichi. When the youngster caught Mooney's wrist, he twisted it, whirled back to the fellow himself, bent almost double, and Rio Mooney went flying over his head and landed upon, and smashed, a table ten feet away!

"That'll be about all of that!" panted Patsy, who was near having one of his famous "brainstorms," he was so furious. "Come! keep away from me and 'tend to your friend on the floor!" he said to one of the waiters who charged him.

Then he whispered swiftly to the girl for whose sake he had started the "rough-house":

"Do you want to get out of this?"

She nodded; sobbing.

"All right. It's time for us to do the 23 quickstep! There's the door behind you. Ah! would ye?"

This last was addressed to the waiter. The fellow had let out a nasty drive with his right fist. Patsy caught it—literally caught the fist! The next instant the waiter was groveling on his knees and screaming for mercy. Patsy had brought him into that attitude with another famous trick of his Japanese comrade.

Under cover of all this Patsy darted to the door after the girl. She was still in the hall of the house, and a big negro wench was darting down the stairs to close the outside door—evidently under the apprehension that a raid on the place was intended by the police.

"None o' that, Little Egypt!" ordered Patsy, hurrying his distressed companion forward. "You can lock the door after we're outside—see?"

They got through, the door was banged to, and he heard the bolts snapped into place. Patsy knew that it would take several minutes for the difficulty to be explained, and the doors to be opened again, and he grasped the girl by the wrist and almost ran her to the corner of Sixth Avenue.

"Which way—up, or down?" he panted in her ear.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Do you live up-town, or down?"

"Up."

"That's our car, then," declared Patsy, and almost before the girl realized it, he had put her aboard a car that just halted at the Twenty-eighth Street corner.

CHAPTER V.

"MISS I DON'T CARE!"

The car was well filled, but Patsy and the girl found seats together near the front door. She had pulled her veil over her face, and quietly wiped her eyes with her handkerchief. They had ridden several blocks before she spoke to her rescuer.

"I am very, very much obliged to you, sir," she said.

"Oh, don't mention it!" said Patsy gloomily.

The girl's voice was unshaken now, and she was evi-

dently a young person much used to taking care of herself and managing her own affairs. Patsy smelled trouble at the start.

She was no easy person to manage, and withal her innocent looks and—as he firmly believed—her unspoiled mind, she would be quite convinced that she needed no escort and nobody to manage matters for her. And in this guess he was perfectly correct, being proven so by the girl's next whispered words.

"I do not know you," she said, "and can only believe that you are a gentleman, and that it was your natural chivalry and gallantry that urged you to do what you have done?"

"Aw—say!" murmured Patsy.

"Such being the case," the girl hastened to say, "I shall ask you to leave the car where it will be most convenient to you, and allow me to continue home by myself."

"Look here," said Patsy, "don't you think that's rather hard?"

"I don't know you——"

"But I'd love to tell you who I am," interposed Garvan, grinning at her cheerfully.

"Do you propose to take advantage of the circumstances which—which flung us together?" she asked bitingly.

"That's putting it rather strong, miss——"

"I don't care!"

"You don't want to give me a wrong impression of what and who you are, do you?" demanded Patsy sternly.

"What can it possibly matter to you who I am?"

"Look here, miss!" exclaimed Patsy, "you must be wise to the fact that I have some interest in you."

"I don't understand why you should," she said haughtily.

"Say! do you think I go around butting into games like that back yonder," and Patsy gestured with his thumb over his shoulder, "just for the fun of the thing?"

"I don't care about that, sir!"

"But, see here! you owe me some explanation."

"I do not admit it!"

"Say! you're like the feller who, when he was arguing, declared that he 'denied the facts!' There's something coming to me for what I did."

"Ah! then you are *not* a gentleman?" she said, in the chilliest way imaginable.

She fumbled with the purse that hung from her wrist. "How much do you consider your task is worth?"

"Some information," returned Patsy coolly, sitting back in his seat.

"Not from me, sir!" she snapped.

"Yes, from you. I am pretty sure you did not belong with that bunch——"

"Mr. Strusse introduced me to those people."

"Thanks! That's one small item, and thankfully received. Then you know the festive Harold?"

"Are you trying to pump me, sir?"

"I am—exactly."

"You are perfectly frank about it!" she cried wonderingly.

"Why shouldn't I be? You'd know it, anyway, so I might as well tell you that I want some information about Mr. Strusse."

"You'll not get it from me."

"Then I shall get it from people who know you."

"No, sir! I shall not let you meet anybody whom I know."

"In other words, you won't go home if I follow you?"

"I certainly shall not leave this car till after you do."

"My! we're in for a nice long ride," Patsy said, smiling. "This car goes to Fort George."

"You are taking great liberties, young man," said the girl behind her veil, and now her voice trembled again.

"I am sorry that you think so. Sure, miss!" declared the honest Patsy, "I'd go a good bit out of me way to make you like me rather than dislike me."

"Now you are insolent!"

"Be the powers——"

"And I always thought an Irishman was so gallant!" murmured the girl.

"Sure, 'tis the blarney stone you must have kissed yerself, miss," chuckled Patsy. "But I'm not to be wheedled that way."

She was apparently indignantly silent at this, and held her little head high.

"Look at it sensible, now, miss," began Patsy. "I dropping into that joint for the express purpose of finding out something about that young soft-boiled——"

"*Who?*"

"Strusse, I mean."

"Harold!" exclaimed the girl.

"Aain't I tellin' you so?" demanded Patsy. "I have a reason for learning something about him."

"But I have told you that you cannot gain any information from me!" she declared.

"And that's where you're wrong, miss! Willingly or not, you'll tell me something in the end. I heard you say that he brought you there. You must know him well——"

"I believed him to be a gentleman. And he was kind to me."

"How kind to you?" asked Patsy quickly.

"Now you are getting personal again," said the girl, and shook her head negatively.

"And it's personal information I want, miss."

"Not from me?"

"Yes, from you."

"You are very foolish, young man."

"How's that?" asked Patsy.

"You are wasting your time. I have nothing to tell you."

"Oh, yes, you have. I heard enough and saw enough in that joint to know that you didn't know just what you was running up against when you went there with Strusse to-night—eh?"

The girl nodded at this, but said nothing.

"And you never were there before?"

"Perhaps not," she murmured.

"Well, miss, you have been in danger."

"Sir!"

"Any girl is in danger who goes out unchaperoned with such a beast as that Strusse——"

"I see now that I was gravely mistaken in you," interrupted the girl haughtily.

"Eh?"

"I thought you were a gentleman. I see my mistake."

"Indeed, miss!" exclaimed Patsy, rather irritated now. "Yes. No gentleman would speak that way of an absent party——"

"Aw, chee!" ejaculated Patsy, in vast disgust. "Come on back and I'll say it to that mutt's face! Only he's too drunk by now to understand me if I said it."

The girl began to sob again. It hit Patsy hard on the instant that she had some reason for being deeply interested in Harold Strusse. That such a pretty and apparently decent girl should be interested in the dissolute son of the Wood Pulp Trust director "rattled" Patsy. He couldn't get a line on the situation.

But he was bound that he would understand it! He hated to force the girl against her will to reveal what he wanted. But it was time to "put on the screw-pressure," and Patsy proceeded to do it.

"There's a whole lot of things in this world that you ain't wise to yet, I reckon," he said slowly; "and one of 'em is that no decent man would take a girl like you into that joint we just came out of."

"I didn't know it was so bad," she murmured.

"But little Harold knew just how bad it was. And he's a bad egg himself—you take my tip on it. How long have you known him?"

"Only two weeks."

"And do your folks let you go out with a feller like him that has only been shinin' round for a fortnight?"

"I—I haven't any—— Now! you just stop!" exclaimed the girl, glaring at him suddenly through the veil. "You will not pry into my affairs."

"I'm bound to do that, miss—just for your own sake."

"You don't need to concern yourself with my concerns!" and she was still angry.

"You'll get into worse trouble than this if you're let alone."

"I don't care!"

"And if you stick to Harold Strusse he'll get you in worse company than you were in to-night. Why, that feller that insulted you is a well-known crook!"

"I don't care!" muttered the girl again, and quite as sullenly as before.

"What's your name, and where do you live?" demanded Patsy sternly. "You might as well tell me at once, for I propose to stick to you until you tell me."

"I won't tell you!"

"Then you and I are bound to be together a long time."

"I don't care!"

"I guess that must be your name," chuckled Patsy. "'Miss I-don't-care'. It's a new one on me, but it'll do for now."

"If you don't leave me alone!" exclaimed the girl desperately, yet still speaking under her breath, "I'll call the conductor and ask him to get a policeman. I'll have you arrested if you don't leave me, sir!"

"Don't do anything so foolish, Miss I-don't-care," said Patsy, smiling. "I may as well tell you that no policeman would arrest me on your complaint."

"Indeed!"

"I may as well tell you that I am the assistant of Nick Carter, the greatest detective in this little old burg, at least, and that if you force my hand I may have to

take unpleasant steps to make you give me the information that I desire.

"I'm mighty sorry, little girl, if I have scared you," added Patsy, as he saw the girl shrink from him and heard her exclamation of fear. "But you are in a bad way, and evidently don't know it. And not only for your own sake, but because I want certain information from you, you must make me your confidant!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIRL WHO HAD HER OWN WAY.

The number of passengers in the car had decreased considerably during the few minutes Patsy and his fair companion had been riding up-town; and nobody noticed the strange discussion that went on between the two. But now, at Patsy's final and stern statement, the girl gave evidence of being deeply moved.

"Oh! oh! I must get out!" she gasped, suddenly seizing the young fellow by the wrist. "I—I don't want to faint!"

"Brace up, my lady," said the warm-hearted Irish lad. "I ain't half so bad as they usually paint private detectives. Don't you be afraid of me."

"Stop the car!" gasped the girl, and struggled to rise.

Patsy, judging that the outer air and exercise would likely cure her malady quickest, signaled the conductor, and when the car halted at the next corner, he almost bore her from it to the sidewalk in his arms.

They were two blocks from Central Park, and in the seventies. They turned east and left the brighter-lighted avenue. The girl continued to sob and leaned heavily on Patsy's arm; but she walked more firmly after a time. When they crossed Columbus Avenue, the young fellow asked cheerfully:

"Well, is it on this block, Miss I-don't-care?"

"What?" she asked chokingly.

"Do we stop here?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you live on this block?"

"If I did I wouldn't tell you!" she declared, with recovered courage.

"Ah! now we're coming 'round," said Patsy easily. "Feel better, don't you?"

"You are the *worst* boy!" declared the girl, looking at him through her veil.

"Ah, don't say that! Strusse is a blamed sight worse than me," grinned Patsy.

"Mr. Strusse was very, very kind to me," declared the mysterious girl with gravity.

"Say! tell me about it," urged Patsy.

"You are bound to get me to talk," she complained.

"Sure. And about Harold boy, too."

"This is about myself."

"Better yet!" declared Patsy.

They had reached the corner of Central Park West. There was an entrance through the low park wall directly across the street.

"Come over to the park, and let us find a bench," said the girl, with sudden decision. "If I am to have you tagging about with me all night, I don't propose to walk my shoes off!"

"That's wise, miss. We'll sit down to this talkfest."

"You *are* the very oddest fellow!" cried the girl again.

"I'm as odd as Dick's hat-band," admitted Patsy, with a smile. "But I've one particular oddity. I always stick to a thing till it's finished. So, if you are tempted to tell me any fairy-story——"

"Sir!"

"You *might* be tempted, you know."

"You mean I might lie to you?"

"That's an ugly word, miss, that even our president doesn't use," said Patsy, with a chuckle.

"I shall tell you as much, or as little, as I please," said Miss I-don-care, with a toss of her head. "But what I *do* say will be strictly——"

"According to Hoyle, eh?" finished Patsy.

"It will be true," she declared.

"Good! We'll get on famously, then. Why, I can see as plain as day that we'll end by being good friends," said Patsy.

"You must have the gift of second sight, sir. I see nothing of the kind," returned his companion sharply, as Patsy guided her down the darkened walk toward a bench that stood full in the moonlight, and in an opening where nobody could creep near enough to overhear them without being observed.

Patsy smiled when he seated her, and saw her glance sharply around.

"We're quite alone here—saving for Mrs. Grundy," he said.

"Do you think a girl like me is afraid of what people will say of her?" she demanded, with asperity.

"That's just what I don't understand," returned Patsy, somewhat humbly.

"What's that?"

"I want to know just what sort of a girl you are?"

"And I'll tell you," said she, with some desperation in her tone. "You'll say I'm a fool; but you don't know what kind of a home life I have had ever since my parents died."

"Begin at the beginning," advised Patsy.

"But no names! You mustn't expect me to tell you who I am or where I came from."

"Humph! That's as may be. Let me hear how much you *will* tell," returned Patsy quietly.

The girl was silent a moment. Then she turned suddenly on the seat, fixed her eyes on the young fellow, and began:

"In the first place, I'm of age!"

"Huh?" grunted Patsy, somewhat taken aback at that.

"Yes. You, or nobody else, can send me back to—well, to the place I came from. In that State girls are of age when they are eighteen, and I was eighteen three months ago. I found that out, from a lawyer, and I know where I stand."

"Good!" said Patsy heartily, yet smiling. "I don't know what you are driving at, but it's nice to have a solid foundation, anyway."

"Don't you joke me. This is serious. My father left all my money tied up until I became twenty-one. But that did not curtail my freedom when I arrived at the legal age."

"That sounds as though a lawyer had told it to you, too," suggested Patsy laughingly.

"Well, I had been in misery for years. My guardian was a—a beast! I hate him!"

Patsy had no comment to make here. The girl spoke so emphatically that he was sobered.

"I hate him!" she repeated. "He wanted to marry me. He's old enough to be my father. I wouldn't marry him. He and his sister nagged the life pretty nearly out of me. When my eighteenth birthday arrived I had made my plans.

"I demanded my allowance for the next quarter. He gave it to me. Then I told him flatly I should go away. He could not legally stop me, although he might refuse to let me have any more money until the final settlement, three years hence. I—I thought I could make five hundred dollars last longer," she added, with hesitation.

"In New York?" asked Patsy, with a sly grin.

"I came to New York, yes. It's very expensive. I haven't bought scarcely a new thing; but all my money went two weeks and more ago. I didn't know what to do. I don't know how to earn money. I didn't dare try to get on the stage. I know that no decent manager would take a girl like me unless she had some histrionic ability—and I haven't any. And so—and so—I almost starved!"

She said it with sudden vehemence, and in a tone that told Patsy that it cost her considerable to make the admission. And as for Patsy himself, he was startled.

"Almost starved?" he repeated in wonderment.

"Yes."

"You ran out of money?"

"Every penny went. I paid my rent a week ahead, and hadn't a cent left for food."

"And you were hungry?"

"I—I didn't eat for two whole days!" declared the girl earnestly. "And nobody would give me work."

"Say!" exclaimed Patsy. "Let me understand this. You went around—er—dressed like you are now, and asked for work?"

"Why, yes. I had nice dresses——"

"And jewelry?"

"Ye-es."

"And went hungry?"

"But I couldn't eat jewelry!" cried Miss I-don't-care.

"Aw, say! I could live a month on one o' them rings you got here," declared Patsy, clasping her little hand and feeling the stone of her ring under the glove.

"You'd sell it?"

"I'd hock it."

"I—I'm not sure I know——"

"Oh, splash! I'd have left it with my uncle. I'd have pawned it, lady. Don't you see?"

"Oh! I couldn't do that!" she cried, shrinking at the very thought.

"Well, say! wouldn't that give you a foolish fit?" muttered Patsy. "You could starve easier than you could hock your sparklers, eh?"

"I—I didn't know how," whispered the girl. "I—I——Somehow, it seemed a disgraceful thing to do. I *did* try to go into a place. But I was ashamed."

"Say!" exclaimed Patsy. "You're a nifty girl to have your own way—I don't think!"

"I told you that you would think me a fool," said the girl, with bitterness.

"I don't say that. But there's one sure thing about you. You ought not to be let run alone."

"Thank you! I am quite able to take care of myself," she returned haughtily.

"Yes?"

"Now, don't sneer, sir! I am."

"And you take care of yourself by going hungry?"

"We-ell——"

"Just so! And how did you get out of it—or did you starve to death?" demanded Patsy, grinning openly at her.

"That is where Mr. Strusse comes in," stammered the girl.

"Ah! now we're getting down to cases," returned Patsy. "Let's hear about it."

CHAPTER VII.

HOW HAROLD CAME IN.

The moonlight flooded the park lawn before them, and the wooded knoll behind was lit up as though by a limelight. For a minute or two the girl sat speechless, her hands eagerly clasped, looking out upon the shadowless expanse which faced them.

That her mind was wrung by the thoughts which filled it, Patsy plainly saw. And while she remained for the time thoughtless of his presence, he scrutinized the contour of her face, half-hidden though it was by the veil she wore.

What manner of girl was she? Since he had first seen her in the music-hall with her dissolute companions, Patsy had been of half a dozen different minds regarding Miss I-don't-care, as he had nicknamed her.

She was a mystery. A more elusive and puzzling character he had never met during his career as Nick Carter's assistant. Vivacious she had been while in the company of Strusse and his companions; yet there seemed to be an innocence in her fun that could not have been assumed.

And more and more, as the minutes passed and Patsy remained in her company, did the young fellow understand that his companion was a most remarkable individual possessing a mixture of assurance, and ignorance of the world, such as even he had seldom met. And he was convinced now, too, that no evil had spoiled Miss I-don't-care's mind!

It was an effort for the young girl to explain to Patsy just how desperate had been her strait when the son of the Wood Pulp Trust director had come to her rescue.

Suddenly she turned to Patsy, threw back her veil, and looked searchingly into Garvan's face. Her own beautiful countenance was very pale; but her eyes burned darkly, and she was exceedingly in earnest.

"I wonder if, after all, I can trust you even to this extent?" she whispered, seeming to try to look into Patsy's very soul.

The young Irishman met her gaze smilingly.

"You can't tell much by the looks of a toad how far it can hop, Miss I-don't-care," he chuckled.

But her serious mood was not broken.

"Were you ever hungry, sir?" she asked quietly.

"Bless us and save us! Many's the time!"

"I mean, with that terrible, gnawing hunger—something that grips you so that you can think of nothing else but the fact of your famishing? Think of it! I was starving! Nothing but cold water passed my lips for more than forty-eight hours—and I had been eating stinted rations for two weeks before. I realized, you see, that my money would not long hold out."

"Ye poor little girl!" muttered Patsy, but made no further comment.

"I—I lived in a nice house. I didn't dare move, for I feared that I might get into a place that was unsafe, or not respectable."

This sounded odd from a girl that Patsy had taken out of such a place as that music-hall, and who seemed to care so little for the proprieties of polite society. But he did not mention it.

"So a good deal of my money went for room rent. I did not board there for the few weeks toward the end, as it cost so much. I could get little bites in dairy restaurants as I needed them, for much less money. And that is how I existed.

"But then the day came when I spent my last five cents because I was so hungry that I just had to!" added the girl, with a sob, "and then I didn't have anything.

"I was afraid my landlady would suspect I was not eating; so I did not stay in the house, I went out and walked, trying to forget my hunger. And I did not creep back to my room again until after dark that first night. The second day I couldn't walk so much. I was too sick. I had to go home in the middle of the afternoon, and the lady saw me and said I must be sick. I

admitted I had a headache. She asked if she could send up my dinner to me, and I had to refuse—oh! you have no idea how hard it was to refuse that dinner!" and the girl clasped her hands again. "And I wouldn't have had to pay for it—just then! You see, it was awful hard to refuse!" and her voice trembled.

"Why the devil—beggin' yer pardon, miss!—didn't you take up the old girl's offer?" demanded Patsy.

"Why, I didn't know that I ever *could* pay her—don't you see?" was the simple reply.

"Aw, chee! You'd oughtn't to be let out alone," declared the young fellow, sorrowfully shaking his head.

"Indeed?" she exclaimed, with indignation. "I guess I am fully capable of looking after myself."

"You're just as independent as a hog on ice!" declared Patsy, grinning again. "Spiel ahead, lady!"

She tossed her head, but continued:

"Oh, you can't imagine how I felt! I could really smell the dinner cooking down-stairs. I was almost maddened. While the boarders were eating I got up again, put on my hat and jacket, and went out. I could *not* stand it in the house any longer.

"I've read lots of times about people going without food much longer than I did. But I had never been used to doing it; my appetite was always healthy; and I had not been properly nourished for some time before my funds entirely ran out. So, I suppose, it seemed harder to me.

"And I walked, and I walked!" repeated the girl, her voice lower, and again drawing down the veil that Patsy might not see the tears that had finally gathered in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. "I don't remember where I went. It was eleven o'clock at night, and they told me I was beyond Kingsbridge. You know where that is?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Patsy, moved indeed.

"And I fell in the road. An automobile was coming along. There wasn't anybody in it but the young man driving. He saw me fall down.

"He stopped the car and came and helped me up. But he saw I couldn't stand. So he put me into the front seat beside him. I—I was completely helpless—at the very end of my rope, sir. And I admitted to him what was the matter."

"And he was Harold Strusse?" asked Patsy.

"Yes, sir. And he was so kind. He was really decent about it," declared the girl, recovering something of her usual manner now that she had told what she evidently considered to be "the worst of it."

"You surprise me there," muttered Patsy; but she did not notice this criticism of her rescuer.

"He stopped at the first hotel and made me go in with him and eat a little broth, and some toast, and drink a cup of tea. Oh! I was ravenous! I was hungrier, I believe, after that than before. But he said I'd better wait till later before eating more. And we motored down-town, and about one o'clock we had supper—just the nicest supper I'd ever eat in my life! And then he took me home—and my landlady never suspected."

She fell silent and Patsy waited a full minute before asking her a question. Indeed, he hated to ask it, for he feared what the answer might be! Finally he murmured:

"Well! and what then?"

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"I mean—well, what's happened since?"

"I do not understand you," she said again, and with haughtiness.

"But you haven't lived on the remembrance of that supper ever since?" Patsy demanded, grinning faintly.

"Mr. Strusse was kind enough to accept my note of hand for a sum of money that will keep me while I am learning typewriting and stenography in a school on One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street," said Miss I-don't care frankly. "He believed my story, and said he could advance me the money just as well as not. I shall be able to support myself in eight or nine months, and he tells me that I need not take up my note until I am twenty-one and can force my guardian to give up my property."

Patsy listened to this with a fallen jaw, and his eyes popping out like beads. A more unexpected statement he could not have imagined, and that was a fact!

That Harold Strusse should be able to finance any young lady in this way was, of course, astonishing enough; but the way the girl put it, the fact was overwhelming.

More and more, as he had listened to this strange girl, Patsy had come to believe that she was a pure and decent character. He was pretty sure that Harold Strusse was nothing of the kind. In time the dissolute son of the millionaire might contaminate her mind, too; and perhaps he had started upon that desperate deed in this ingenious way.

The girl was frankly ignorant and innocent of all intentional wrong. What was the secret intention of young Strusse, Patsy could only imagine. Yet he had evidently made his offer of assistance so decently, and had—until this evening, at least—treated the girl so gentlemanly, that she had not suspected his real character.

Patsy's silence was evidently understood by the girl, and she showed her shrewdness by her next words.

"You did not expect this, I presume, sir?"

"Eh? Oh, I——"

She was suddenly very haughty.

"Plainly, you thought exceeding ill of me. I said at first that what I told you would be the truth. Mr. Strusse has been kindness itself to me. When he is sober he is a very nice boy. To-night he surprised me by his actions. And if that place, and those people, were as bad as you asy——"

"I guess you saw it all yourself," interrupted Patsy keenly.

"That is so! I am angry with Mr. Strusse. But I blame his drinking. I shall not go out anywhere with him again unless he promises to leave the drinking out of it. But these rich young men——"

"So you think Harold boy is rich, eh?" demanded Patsy.

"Isn't his father a millionaire?"

"He hasn't fooled you there, miss."

"And your underhanded suggestions will not make me believe that he has fooled me in any other particular," she declared warmly. "He has proven himself my friend—and I can assure you that he has proposed no arrangement to me that a lady could not accept."

"He is in love with you, is he?" asked Patsy bluntly.

He saw her throat flush scarlet in the moonlight.

"That is ridiculous! We are both too young to think of such things. I—I would not listen to him if he attempted to make love to me!"

Patsy was silenced, and shook his head. He did not know what to say for the moment. The girl squared her shoulders and tapped the walk with an impatient foot.

"I do not understand," she said, "why you are so much interested in Mr. Strusse, or in me. But I can assure you that I have told you all that I intend to. If you had me arrested—as you say you can—and brought me into court, I should refuse to say another word."

"Say," suddenly said Patsy, with a sly look, "won't you tell me just one thing more?"

"I'll not tell you my name, or where I live, or anything of the kind. I'll sit here all night before I will let you go home with me. If you are a good boy at all, you'll come out to the corner here and put me on the car and let me go home alone."

"Well, by Jove! I will!" exclaimed Patsy suddenly. "That is, on one condition."

"I'll not tell you——"

"This has nothing to do with your name or number," laughed Patsy.

"Well, what is it?"

"Will you answer me just one more question?"

"Is that your condition?"

"Yes."

"If it has nothing to do with my name and address, or anything that may reveal them, or anything more of my private affairs, or anything that might be considered detrimental to Mr. Strusse, I agree!"

"All right," said Patsy quickly. "This is outside all that. But I'm a bit curious. Where did you get that brooch you're wearing?" and he lightly touched the strange yellow stone that shone dully at her throat.

"Why—I—— That is a strange question," she said slowly.

Patsy threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"You beat me!" he exclaimed. "I am going to do exactly as you asked me. I'll put you on the car and take another car in an opposite direction, if you want me to. But I've been noticing that brooch and thought I'd gratify my curiosity. I'd really like to feel as though I'd got *one* answer out of you, anyway."

The girl was smiling again, too, now.

"I see no reason why I should not tell you. It's nothing but a beryl—rather a peculiar shade, I believe. But not so very valuable, otherwise I would not have allowed him to give it to me."

"Meaning Mr. Strusse?" Patsy queried, still with assumed indifference.

"Yes. He wanted to give me a keepsake. I'll admit he suggested a ring, or a bracelet. He brought them to me to choose for myself, but I would not listen to him. I—I would not let him be sentimental."

"So he *is* pretty sweet on you?" suggested Patsy, pulling a woebegone face.

"Don't be silly! Anyway, I accepted this because he assured me it was not particularly valuable."

"You went with him to buy it?"

"No. He brought it to me," she said briefly. "And now I will not answer another question!" and she got up from the bench.

"All right, Miss—I-don't-care! I shan't ask another," said Patsy, and arose likewise.

CHAPTER VIII.

PATSY REMEMBERS.

And not only did he not ask another question, but Patsy did not speak to her as they moved out of the park and waited for the up-town car on the curb of Central Park West. It was the girl who broke the silence, and she did it with some hesitation.

"I—I hope you will believe what I have told you of myself," she said. "I know it is strange——"

"I believe every word of your story, miss," declared Patsy, bowing gravely. "Here is your car."

She turned just before stepping aboard, and actually offered him her hand.

"Good night!" she said.

But Patsy only bowed, and said no further word. And he stood for ten solid minutes in that spot, looking after the car which quickly disappeared; but really not with his mind fixed on the mysterious girl at all. One thing only held his thoughts in captivity, and that was the query:

Where had he seen that yellow beryl before?

Somewhere the young man knew he had seen the odd brooch, that it had been called to his attention by some incident. And furthermore, he had the feeling that in that yellow beryl lay the mystery of Harold Strusse's suddenly acquired fortune!

For the fellow, who had fifty a month from his father and three per week from his employment, certainly must be handling a small fortune if he could afford to finance such a swell-dressed young lady as this strange girl, to offer to give her jewelry, and to spend all the money that Cleveland Parr reported he was "throwing to the birdies."

Patsy's query about the yellow beryl had been a chance one, after all. He had been curious about the brooch, it was true; but in listening to the girl's story and in studying over the problem of her character and Strusse's possible influence over her, the young detective had almost forgotten the peculiar stone.

Then he had looked up at her and chanced to see the gem gleaming under the perfect oval of her chin, and he had sprung the question more as a "josh" than anything else.

But it had proved to be a promising lead. Harold Strusse had given her that odd-looking jewel, and Patsy was positive that he had seen the brooch before—somewhere. With the brooch Harold had offered the girl the choice of other articles of adornment!

"By ginger!" muttered Patsy, as he stood in this brown study on the curbstone of the lonely avenue. "Has Harold boy cracked a jeweler's safe? Is that the foundation of his sudden fortune? Or did he get hold of hard cash and blow a lot of it on jewelry to give away to pretty girls? Wow! This is a Chinese puzzle, all right!

"What would Nick say about this?" he added the next moment. "I'm fretting my mind about how Harold got hold of the yellow beryl—and other gewgaws; but isn't that the wrong point to start from?

"I believe Nick Carter would say that I was putting the cart before the horse. That isn't the first question that I should discuss—no, indeed!

"I feel certain that some time previous to this evening I have either seen this yellow beryl, or one very much like it. Now, where would I likely see such a thing? In a shop-window? It's an antique-looking article, and there aren't very many so-called antique shops in this town—that would sell that sort of a jewel.

"Now, when have I ever been to one of those stores—or seen any collection of strange jewels—or—or—I might have seen that brooch on some dame's neck!" finished Patsy suddenly. "Yet there aren't many women it would look nice on. That little girl's just the right complexion, and she's vivacious enough to carry off any amount of savage ornaments. I reckon she'd look good with a nose-ring on her!

"Well, it's me for home. I might just as well give up Harold boy for the night. I wonder what Nick will say to my letting the girl go? Huh! Mebbe I didn't have any call to chase her around, anyway. Harold Strusse is the party I'm supposed to be gumshoeing!"

He crossed over and took the next car down-town. At the house he managed to creep to bed without being noticed by his principal, and there he lay for some time, tossing and thinking—first of the girl, then of Strusse,

then of the odd jewel that so puzzled him, and back again to the girl—always of the girl!

Her charming personality had taken a firm hold upon Patsy. Every time he closed his eyes he could call up her perfect vision. He could see her as plainly as he had while they sat together on the bench in the moonlight.

He could see the curve of her veiled cheek, her little gloved hands so tightly clasped in her lap as she related her story, and as clear as ever to his mind's eye was the glowing, yellowish stone in its old-gold setting.

That brooch! It held the key to the mystery of Harold Strusse's sudden fortune. Patsy was convinced of this.

Again and again he was brought back to this thought. He tried to recall once more incidents in his life which had in any way connected him with gems of such antique appearance as the yellow beryl.

And so he gradually fell into deeper strata of thought, yet still half-conscious. Suddenly the vision of the girl disappeared. To his half-somnolent fancy there came another picture—and one that in his stupefied state he did not recognize as at all familiar at first. Memory plays us strange pranks.

Here was a long, dusky room. There were hangings of Persian texture, rugs of Indian manufacture, tables and screens and vases of Japan and China. There were, too, strange shields and weapons hung against the tapestried walls; ugly Indian gods leered from corners; tables of teakwood were loaded with ivory carvings. And there were glass cases holding trays of ancient coins, jewels——

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Patsy Garvan, sitting suddenly up in bed, and wide-awake. "That's old Moe's junk-shop on Fourth avenue, as sure as I'm a foot high! And that's where I've seen a yellow beryl. Gee! And I ain't been into that ranch for two years!"

Nick Carter had several rules which he frequently repeated for the especial benefit of his assistants. Patsy, in his light-hearted way, frequently remarked that Nick "dinged the morals eternally" into their ears. The rules of conduct were all good, however, if a man expected to be a success in the criminal-detecting game.

Nick warned Patsy and Ten-Ichi to be observant, to notice little things, to learn to comprehend details at a glance, *and to use their eyes to see with!*

"A whole lot of folks," Nick had been known to say, "look without seeing. They may not actually need treatment by an oculist, but they do not really *see*.

"The master of minute observation was the great Houdan, the magician, who lived many years ago. His son almost equaled him in powers of observation and memory, and all because the elder Houdan trained the younger indefatigably.

"They would pass swiftly along a Parisian street and glance into a shop window in which many small articles were displayed. Each would glance into the window, and then, when at home, they would sit down and write out lists of what they had comprehended in that single glance. Then with the lists they would go back and compare the result of their memory and observation with the actual display.

"It would be a good practise for every man who seeks to strengthen his memory and observation."

These remarks of Nick Carter's, as most of his advice did, made some considerable impression on Patsy's mind. And he had often tried the experiment originated by the famous European magician. The ordinary person becomes confused in looking at a large number of small objects gathered together. He goes away either with an idea that there were only two or three things worth noticing, or that there was a great jumble of articles whose colors and shapes he can never set right in his memory.

Patsy, however, by studying along the lines of Nick's suggestion, was enabled to see a larger number of things at once than most people—*and he remembered them afterward!*

He sat there in his bed and recalled now every appearance of the old Jew's curiosity-shop, and the things he had seen in it. It was the glass case of jewelry—mostly antiques—near the door that held the attention of Patsy's groping memory.

It contained trays lined with faded velvet, and in those trays lay all manner of dull and tarnished gewgaws—seal rings of ancient date—or apparently ancient date—old-fashioned earrings, bangles, brooches, pins of every queer kind. A collection, in fact, made up of some undoubted antiques and many whose pedigree was more than a little doubtful.

It was the tray of brooches that Patsy endeavored, in the silent watches of the night, to bring before his mental vision. The contents of this case was just what the young fellow had practised on so many times in his memory-training exercises. There was a diversity in their appearance, and there were a lot of them.

Patsy sat there, staring into the darkness of the room,

his hands unconsciously clenched, his whole mind and will centered upon the problem. Gradually he gained a clearer vision of the particular collection of brooches which he had seen in old Moe Levy's antique shop. Yet it was not satisfactory. He saw the yellow beryl as clearly as though it were really before his eyes! But Patsy was not sure that that wasn't a trick his memory was playing on him!

He had just observed the jewel. Therefore it would stand out distinctly in his mind. He remembered some odd-looking pieces that had been in the tray—but dimly; the yellow beryl was as prominent as a sore toe on a barefooted boy!

"Aw, gee!" he muttered at last, dropping back on the pillow. "I got to go to old Moe's to make sure. I believe that's where I saw such a brooch before; but I wouldn't take my oath on it."

He slept after that, but the pretty Miss I-don't-care and the yellow beryl danced through his dreams.

CHAPTER IX.

ON A BACK TRAIL.

"Well," said Nicholas Carter, smiling in his slow way, when he had listened to young Patsy's report the next morning. "I am not sure that it is safe to let you run alone, Patsy. I never knew it to fail that, the minute you get on a case 'by your lonesome,' as they say, you manage to ring a girl into it."

Patsy grinned, abashed, and had little to say at the moment.

"It strikes me that you went out duck-shooting, and brought in a crow," continued the detective.

"Sure, sir, you wouldn't call that pretty girl a crow!" exclaimed Patsy slyly.

"Not gallant, I admit," laughed Nick. "But you were on a still hunt for other game. How about Strusse?"

"I tell you that I believe the mystery about that soft-boiled's bank-roll is connected with the girl," said Patsy doggedly.

"And with her yellow beryl?" suggested Nick thoughtfully. "Well! it may be so. I think myself that the discovery of how Harold came into possession of that bauble may lead to something. And, as you didn't succeed in nesting the girl herself, you might as well follow this back trail, and then I'll have young Strusse looked after, when his hours at the lawyer's office are over this afternoon, by either Chick or Ten-Ichi. Run along, Patsy, my boy, and see what you can learn from old Moe."

Thus advised, young Garvan made for Fourth avenue and Moe Levy's shop of antiques. Moe was of the old generation of Jewish merchants, with every trait of his nation accentuated in both his manner and personal appearance.

He met Patsy with an unctious washing of hands and profound bowing, his twinkling black eyes hopeful in their expression of a good bargain.

"Forget it! forget it, Moe!" advised Nick Carter's assistant. "Nothing doing this morning. I'm only after information."

"Vell, vell!" returned the old Hebrew, with a toothless grin. "Dot vas not so padt. Somedimes information is vort' monish—heh?" and he chuckled at his own joke.

"This ain't," said Patsy, with decision. "I'm only going to ask you a question or two, and you'll have to answer for old acquaintance's sake, Moe."

"Vell? Vat iss idt?" demanded the seller of antiques.

"Who did you sell that brooch to that I was looking at here one day?" asked Patsy, with effrontery. "The one set with the yellow beryl?"

Now Patsy had absolutely no positive remembrance of having seen that brooch in Moe's shop; yet he believed he must have seen it there, and he was taking no chances with the old fellow. There might be some reason why the dealer in antiques preferred to deny the sale of the brooch; therefore the young detective spoke with confidence.

"De yellow beryl?" mouthed Moe, looking at Patsy sharply.

"That's what I said, old gent. How about it? You had it in one of those cases, you know."

"Vell, vell! I remember," admitted Moe, nodding.

"Who did you sell it to?"

"For vy didt you vish to know, Misder Garvan?" demanded the old Jew.

"Say! you'd oughtn't to be a Jew," said Patsy in disgust. 'You are a regular Yankee for asking questions."

"Vell, vell!" ejaculated old Moe. "You do someding like dot yourselluf—heh?"

"That's different. It's me business to ask 'em," declared Patsy, with an answering grin. "But come on, old hunks! Who bought the yellow beryl?"

"Dot vas a fery fine andique," declared Moe, shaking his head and moving toward the case in question.

"Ah! then it *was* here," thought Patsy, with secret delight. But aloud he said, and in a most scornful tone:

"'Antique!' Pooh, Moe! that wasn't an antique. That was a fake, and you know it."

"Vell, vell! so you t'ink—heh?"

"I think pretty near that, old Fifty-per-cent!"

"Vell! you can nodt make me mad, Misder Garvan. But you do me von wrong—yes! Dot yellow beryl was a vonderful bargain. See!"

The old Jew had slid open the door of the case as he spoke, reached in his hand, and drew something forth; and there lay on his yellow palm, under Patsy's astonished eyes, the exact replica of the yellow beryl that he had seen worn by the mysterious girl with whom he had had his adventure the night before.

"Aw, chee!" muttered Patsy, dumfounded for the moment.

"Dot vas a very fine andique," declared old Moe calmly. "I nefer rememper of showing idt to you, Misder Garvan; but you haf a good memory yourselluf—heh?"

"Keh!" grunted Patsy, eying the brooch reflectively.

"To *you*, mein freindt, I vould sell dot for seventy-five dollars—undt dot vould be a loss, so hellup me!"

"It certainly would be a distinct loss to *me* if I paid you such a price for it," chuckled Patsy. "But I'm not in the market for such a pin, Moe."

"No?"

"Not at all."

"Den vot vould be your bleasure, Misder Garvan," asked the Jew, with twinkling eyes.

Patsy had sized up the situation quickly, and suddenly his face expanded in a grin.

"They're pretty popular, I expect—eh?" he queried, taking the brooch in his hand.

"Vell, vell! you vould nodt call bopular an andique dot——"

"Made by the gross, eh? Get out, Moe! This isn't the brooch you showed me the last time I was in here. You sold that one, I know. This is a replica of it. Now tell the truth and shame the devil!"

The ancient Hebrew looked at him craftily.

"You vant me to shpoil mein own pitziness, heh?" he croaked.

"This is strictly on the q. t.," said Patsy reassuringly. "You can sell one a week for all of me. But I saw the original last night."

"Tot, tot!" exclaimed the old Jew. "You t'ink dese iss as blenty as green abbles—heh?"

"Well, there's another like this, all right, all right."

"Yellow beryls are nodt common—nein!"

"But you had two alike?"

"Vell, vell! If I say so, dot vas nodt to advertise mein pitziness—heh?"

"I see. And who did you sell the first one to?"

"Vor v'y you ask, heh?"

"I tell you straight," said Patsy, at last believing that he was on the right track, and knowing that old Moe had a healthy respect for the police. "It's been stolen, I believe. I knew yellow beryls weren't common. I saw that other brooch where it had no business to be. I want to know who got it from you, and so trace the robbery, if there's been one, see?"

"Vell, vell! If I cannot sell him to you——"

"Indeed you can't!"

"Den ve vill pudt him pack," said Moe, with a sigh.

"I told you it was only information I wanted," declared Patsy.

"Den ve vill see vot ve vill see," muttered the old man.

Motioning to his one clerk to come forward to watch the front of the store, the old Jew led the way back to his stuffy little office, and there, after climbing on a high stool, and adjusting a pair of steel-bowed spectacles, opened a huge ledger.

He ran his pudgy finger up and down the long lines of crabbed writing. A dealer in antiques is like no other merchant. He likes to keep run of the people who have money to spend—more or less foolishly—upon such goods as he handles. Then, too, he doesn't care to offer exactly the same article *twice* to the same "collector." If a man thinks he has the only genuine specimen in existence, so much the better. No need to let him know that they are making exactly the same thing by the gross in Newark, New Jersey!

Old Moe seemed to know about where to look for the record of the sale in question; therefore Patsy came to the conclusion that there really were not many yellow beryls, and that, as he had supposed, such a stone was sure to cause remark.

"Ah! here she vas," murmured the Jew. "You see? Yes! Von year—no t'irteen mont's ago I sell dot yellow beryl. It vas to Misder Methuen—you know him—vot? He iss in de real estate pitziness."

"Abraham Methuen?"

"Dot vas de man," declared Moe.

"Sure, I know who he is. Got a swell shack on the Drive."

"Idt vas Misder Methuen."

"And that's the only one you ever sold?"

"Dot von—an' dis—are de only two I effer saw, mein freindt—so hellup me!" declared old Moe, nodding vigorously.

"Then it's up to me to find this Methuen and learn what he did with the pin. You're sure it isn't common?"

"So hellup me! I made me a drawin' of de brooch meinselluf, undt had this stone set in de new brooch. I tell you dis private—undt pecause you are mein freindt, Misder Garvan," declared the dealer in antiques, with his fat finger laid beside his nose.

"I understand," nodded Patsy. "And I'll keep mum, Moe."

He took down the date of the sale of the yellow beryl to the real estate man, Methuen, and then hustled out for Riverside Drive, on which the millionaire lived.

One could scarcely mistake the place. Patsy had often had his attention called to the house—it was almost a castle. But it wasn't a residence that showed refined taste—nor yet did it suggest the owner to be a man who would appreciate an antique brooch such as that which the Jew had sold him, and Miss I-don't-care had worn in the lace of her dress.

"Maybe I'm misjudging the man," muttered Patsy, as he neared the great pile of brick and marble. "But what I've heard of Methuen—who made his money all within half a score of years—would go to show that he's very much of the newly rich! Ye can smell the varnish about this place, all right. Sure, it's meself thinks that anything in the line of an antique would not appeal to him. But you never can tell," laughed Patsy. "These sudden-rich guys develop funny fads sometimes."

At the door Patsy was like to be turned down. The monumental footman who responded to his ring asked crisply for the caller's card, and promised only to get it into the hands of Mr. Methuen's secretary.

"Gee! what's the matter with the main squeeze?" asked Patsy. "Is he sick?"

"Mr. Methuen does not see strangers saving by appointment," declared the footman solemnly.

"Well, then, let's see the buffer," observed Patsy, and taking thought by past experience, he wrote Nick Carter's name under his own and the single word "important."

"And that's no lie, sure!" muttered the young fellow, as he cooled his heels in the marble porch. "It's important to me, all right!"

The magic of the great detective's name had served Patsy more than once. And he had not put his faith in it this time without reason. In a few minutes the massive footman returned and, still eying the young fellow with some suspicion, ushered him into an office at the rear of the hall.

"Mr. Cumber," said the footman, as he let Patsy into the room and closed the door.

The millionaire's secretary was the twin of an undertaker, only his somber garments were relieved by a white vest. He stood twirling Patsy's card in his delicate fingers, and stared at the caller through very shiny eyeglasses.

"Am I to understand that you, sir, are the famous Nicholas Carter, or Mr. P. Garvan?" he asked, drawling his words, and looking Patsy over most patronizingly.

Patsy was wise in a second to the fact that he had a hard nut to crack in Mr. Secretary Cumber! This gentleman had evidently been a buffer for the millionaire real estate speculator so long that he had taken on much of the hauteur supposed to be the private property of the plutocrat.

It was up to Patsy to interest Cumber in a way that would make that stiff and starched gentleman "open up." And Patsy was hampered by the fact that what he had come to inquire about was absolutely of no interest to Mr. Cumber's employer—unless, perchance, the yellow beryl had really been stolen from him.

Nevertheless, the young Irishman was quick-witted, and he possessed all the "cheek" necessary to carry him through a doubtful interview of this kind. And he went at it now in a way that he believed would hold Mr. Cumber's attention, with the result that he, Patsy, would gain the information he sought before the millionaire's secretary learned that it was he who was doing the favor!

Patsy, indeed, stepped into the room, tried the door after the footman went out as though to make sure it was latched, and then approached close to the surprised Mr. Cumber before answering that gentleman's question.

CHAPTER X.

THE SIDE-STEP OF MR. METHUEN.

"Are you Nicholas Carter, or Garvan?" repeated Mr. Cumber crisply.

"I'll tell you," said Patsy, with every appearance of being on a weighty matter and fearful of being overheard. "I'm really only Patsy Garvan; but I represent Mr. Carter."

"And what is your business?" asked Cumber, staring.

"Say! are we alone here? None of the servants hanging around?"

"I presume not. We do not have eavesdroppers in this house."

"If you know it, I s'pose?" suggested Patsy, with a knowing wink.

"I don't fathom your meaning, Mr. Garvan."

"Well, you'll see me drift in a minute. Only this is private. And when a job like this has been pulled off, we're always more or less afraid of inside help."

"What *do* you mean, sir?" queried Cumber, finally showing some excitement. "Have you come here to tell me that our house has been robbed and that some of the servants are at fault?"

"Well—mebbe not that," admitted Patsy doubtfully. "But it's just as well to be on the safe side."

"About what, pray?"

"Why, Mr. Carter has come upon some particular information which led him to believe that Mr. Methuen might have been robbed—possibly without knowing it."

"Not much he wouldn't be robbed without finding it out!" exclaimed Cumber, snapping his jaws together, and looking as though he believed his employer altogether too sharp a man to lose anything at all!

"Ye never can tell," pursued Patsy.

"Out with it, young man!" ordered Cumber. "What do you know?"

"Mebbe you'll answer a question or two first," suggested Patsy insinuatingly, "and then I'll be able to explain to ye the better."

"Let me hear the question," said Cumber noncommittally.

"Some thirteen months ago—here's the exact date," said Patsy, and repeated the date old Moe Levy had given him, "Mr. Abraham Methuen bought a pin set with a yellow beryl at an antique shop on Fourth Avenue——"

Mr. Cumber had moved suddenly, and turned so that Patsy could not so easily see his face. But the young detective marked his sudden agitation.

"Eh? did ye speak, sir?" he asked quickly.

"I did not, young man," returned the secretary calmly.

"Ye know about this brooch?"

"Perhaps."

"Has Mr. Methuen got it now?"

"What is that to you, sir?" snapped Cumber.

"Sure, 'tis a simple question."

"And may be very shrewd instead of simple," returned the secretary, now smiling again at Patsy.

"Ye don't deny he bought the pin?" cried the young fellow hastily.

"I do not deny it."

"Then, has he still got it?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, if ye must know, we've come across such a pin. It's in the hands of—er—well, of a lady," said the astute Patsy, watching Cumber keenly. "We know it was bought by Mr. Meuthen. We think it may have passed through dirty hands since. We want to know how this—er—lady came to wear it."

Cumber wheeled and looked Patsy up and down searchingly.

"Mr. Garvan, don't you think you are probing into private matters without warrant?" he demanded.

"Not from our standpoint," replied Patsy, still with engaging frankness. "We mean Mr. Methuen no harm, I can assure you."

"That's as may be," returned Cumber doubtfully. "However, suppose I was to tell you that Mr. Methuen has the yellow beryl in his possession?"

"Sure, then," declared Patsy, not to be fooled so easily, "I'd ask ye, as a particular favor, to show it me."

Cumber chuckled suddenly in his throat, and he cast Patsy an admiring glance.

"You're quick, young man. I admit it. And suppose he has *not* the brooch?"

"Then would you be telling me who he—er—gave it to?"

"You suggested that he might have been robbed of it?" queried Cumber.

"And you remarked that Mr. Methuen was not the gentleman to be robbed without knowing it," rapped back Patsy smartly.

Cumber nodded, and was thoughtful for a moment.

"Of course," he said at last, "you have some knowledge of this business? You wouldn't come here else."

Patsy looked as wise as a hoot-owl. But to himself he was thinking:

"Whatever is the old boy driving at? Sure, I've started a fox where I expected to get a hare!"

"This is a matter in which Mr. Methuen takes no pride, as you may be sure. His immediate family know all about it—all about it, understand, Mr. Garvan!" repeated Cumber, in a tone and with a defiant look that assured Patsy the facts were exactly to the contrary.

"We—er—thought the matter was arranged, and that the party—by the way! you say that the—er—lady was wearing the pin?"

"A lady was wearing it—yes."

"You saw it?"

"I did."

"When was this?"

"Last night."

The final answer startled Cumber completely out of his iciness. He jumped, indeed, as though he had been stuck with a pin.

"What's that, sir?" he cried, stepping nearer to Patsy and flinging aside his reserve.

"What's what?" drawled the young man.

"You saw her—last night—here—in New York?"

"Sure!"

"Come, come! That is impossible."

"My eyesight is passing good," returned Patsy.

Cumber was silent again, pacing the office swiftly. Patsy heard him mutter such broken sentences as:

"Could have returned on next steamer—— Ha! it would be like her! A pretty mess—a pretty mess—— And you say she's in New York again?" he completed suddenly, turning on young Garvan.

"The girl with the yellow beryl was certainly in New York last night," declared Patsy.

"Where did you see her?"

"In a joint on Tin-pan Alley."

Cumber actually swore.

"Scarcely any mistake in that, then," he muttered, staring reflectively at Patsy. "It would be like her to dare appear in her old haunts. You know this Amy Rood, then, Mr. Garvan?"

Now, be it known that never in his experience as an assistant of Nick Carter did Patsy come so near being floored! The question was a facer, for it jumbled all Patsy's thoughts into sudden chaos, the one prominent point of which was that the girl he had met the night before had utterly and completely fooled him!

Amy Rood! Why, she had been notorious! At least, for a short time. Patsy remembered the name, and her meteoric career a few months before, very well indeed. He had never met the girl, nor chanced to see her picture; therefore "Miss I-don't-care" had been the better cloak for her true identity.

Amy Rood had appeared on the boards of one of the Broadway theaters in a musical comedy. She had immediately taken the fancy of the "Johnnies." When the season ended it was whispered that she was very friendly with some wealthy "rounder"; but Patsy, had he thought of it at all, would never have suspected the millionaire real estate speculator.

"See here!" exclaimed the secretary, in a tone of desperation. "I might as well tell you the facts of the case. I feel strongly on the subject myself, for Mr. Methuen confided in me and I thought I had arranged the matter in every way satisfactory. He was unwise enough to show some interest in the girl. You might call it a fatherly interest."

"Sure!" exclaimed Patsy, with a face as grave as a judge's.

"But a rich man cannot be too careful. The girl had bad blood in her. She liked lively company. We heard of her as being seen in questionable Tenderloin resorts, and of boasting of her acquaintance with Mr. Methuen. So she had to be sent away. She's English. Had only been over here a year or two. She agreed to go home and never cross the pond again."

"Of course, for a remuneration?" suggested Patsy.

"An annuity. And a good one. I might as well be frank. He had foolishly written her notes—just inviting her to lunch, or dinner, you know. But those, with a few trinkets he had given her, and some dividend stocks, made out a nice case for her. Her lawyers were rather decent——"

"Who were they, by the way?" queried Patsy quickly.

"Messrs. Gresham, Harrity & Polk," said Cumber. "At least, Mr. Harrity is her personal attorney."

"Ah, I see," admitted Patsy, while to himself he thought: "And that is the firm young Strusse works for. I'm on the trail!"

"Well, we thought we were well rid of her. If she had any sense at all she would have stayed across. For

I tell you frankly, Mr. Garvan, Mr. Methuen will be blackmailed no further."

"He shouldn't have gone as far as he has," muttered Patsy.

"Perhaps not. But we did not want a scandal."

"Naturally."

"Now it will all come out, I suppose."

"Don't jump at that conclusion too quickly, Mr. Cumber," said the other quietly. "Tell me where this Amy Rood lived."

"Before I shipped her back home?"

"Yes."

"With a perfectly respectable family. Oh, there really was nothing wrong between Mr. Mathuen and the girl. She simply took advantage of his good nature. Here is the address. But I doubt if you would find her there now. I don't think she would be taken in by them if she has come back from England."

"Thanks. I'll look them up just the same."

"But you haven't told me your interest—or, rather, that of Mr. Carter's—in the matter?" suggested Cumber.

"We are interested in a phase of it that doesn't touch Mr. Methuen as long as he has not been robbed. I'll say, however, that if this girl who is wearing Mr. Methuen's pin is really Amy Rood, she is in with a bad lot, and she may be caught in such a way that we can easily save Mr. Methuen from any further trouble with her—and without the matter becoming more public than it is already."

Cumber was evidently vastly relieved at this statement. He even warmed up to the point of shaking Patsy by the hand when the young detective left.

But the latter went away from the mansion on Riverside Drive sore enough.

"To think how that little cat fooled me! By Jove! I can scarcely believe it, even now! And then, what have I found out that explains Mr. Harold Strusse's possession of a small fortune to blow on Broadway? Whew! I'm deeper in the maze than ever, and that's no lie!"

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

In fact, Patsy Garvan had seldom been up against a proposition out of which he could wring so little juice! He had started forth with Cleveland Parr the evening before with just one object before him—the discovery of the source of young Strusse's sudden wealth. And every turn he had made had been into a blind alley!

Or so it seemed to him as he thought over the circumstances while riding down-town.

Most of all did he, mentally, take himself to task for being so befooled by the girl with the yellow beryl. Her story had touched Patsy's warm Irish heart, and possibly his sympathy had beclouded his unusually keen vision. Yet he believed that he had seen too much of the world to be so easily "strung" by a chit of a girl!

"And chee!" ejaculated Patsy under his breath. "She didn't look a bit like what an adventuress should look. If ever I saw honesty and a pure heart looking out of pretty eyes, they looked out of Miss I-don't-care's!

"Wow! Is it me that's gettin' sentimental over a whisp of a skirt like Amy Rood? Pah! and she mixed up with the crowd she ran with? I'll never trust to appearances again—in connection with girls, that's sure enough!

"Wirra! what a load it will be off me mind when Miss Amy takes a trip across the pond for the second time, and for good and all. For that has got to be one of the results of this investigation, anyway.

"There must be some connection between young Strusse working for Gresham, Harrity & Polk, and one of the partners being Amy Rood's personal attorney. That's how Strusse and the girl got thick, of course. And the song and dance the girl gave me about Harold playing the chivalrous gent—— Shucks! it makes me sick," and Patsy fairly ground his teeth and stamped his heels into the asphalt as he walked.

The house which Cumber had indicated to him as the former boarding-place of Amy Rood was in the Nineties, and near Central Park West.

"I was hot on the trail last night," muttered Patsy, as he drew near the place. "Mebbe she is still staying here. At least, they are likely to know about her. I wish to thunder I hadn't given her me promise last night not to follow her home. I'd have learned a lot, perhaps."

He rang the bell and got word with the landlady easily. It was a nice house, to be sure, and Patsy sized up the lady as above the average of New York boarding-house mistresses.

Would she talk about Amy Rood? Would she, just!

"The nasty little hussy! It's trouble enough she came near making me," declared the mistress, shaking her head

and her face revealing her indignation. "I had no idea she was such a low person when I took her in."

"Ahem!" suggested Patsy. "You took her on Mr. Methuen's recommendation?"

"Indeed I did not! I'd take no single woman on a married man's recommendation—unless I knew all about them both. She came here to board when she went to work for the 'Sweet Isabelle' Company. I've always had nice theatrical people in my house. And that Rood piece seemed all right.

"But when we heard of the places she went to, and the people she consorted with—— And then, what she tried to do to that Methuen—the old fool! I haven't any sympathy for him. But she's a bad girl. And he sent her back home."

"She really left New York, then?"

"Why, she's in England."

"Are you sure, madam?" asked Patsy, hiding a smile.

"Indeed, I took pains to go down to the dock myself and see her off."

"How long ago was this?"

"Nearly three weeks ago. Yes, sir!"

"And she's over there now?"

"Of course! What a fool she'd be to come back. Why, she'd lose the salary that man is paying her to keep her away from his family. He is a nice one, too!"

"You would be surprised to learn that she was back, then?" suggested Patsy.

"I'd never accuse Amy Rood of being a fool, young man!"

She eyed Patsy curiously as she spoke, and after a moment's silence between them, added:

"What are you pleased to mean by these questions, sir?"

"Well, my interest in Amy Rood is purely impersonal and——"

"I should hope so—for your own self-respect, young man," interrupted the woman tartly.

"It is about that peculiar pin she used to wear."

"A pin?"

"A brooch."

"That ugly yellow thing!" ejaculated the woman. "What about it? Did she steal it?"

"Why—no!"

"She always swore it was a present from that Methuen—the old gump! She called it a beryl. It warn't worth much, I guess," with a sniff.

"Such a jewel as that is usually only valuable for its associations, or because it is an heirloom."

"Did he give it to her, really?" asked the woman, eager for gossip.

"He did."

"And I suppose it was his wife's—or was a long time in the family?"

"No. He bought it for her. But I saw it worn by—by a girl last night."

"*What?*" cried the boarding-house keeper.

Patsy repeated his statement.

"Never!—begging your pardon, young man. She'd never have given that away. She's a dark girl, you know. She thinks that yellow becomes her. *I* think it makes her complexion look muddy. And she wore that stone always."

"There are probably not many such yellow stones," said Patsy.

"Well, I don't know about that. But you may believe that wherever Amy Rood is, she is wearing that pin. Unless she was ashamed to take it back home with her. They say her folks are respectable."

"You know something about her family, then?"

"From another English girl who always stays here when she's in off the road."

"Indeed!"

"Why, Mary is here now, and she got a letter from that awful creature only yesterday."

"Yesterday?" exclaimed Patsy, surprised himself now.

"Yes. She had the impudence to write Mary almost as soon as she got home."

"The letter came from England?"

"Of course. I saw it myself. I saw the envelope. Oh, Amy Rood is in London, all right, young man. Mr. Methuen need not be afraid that she will ever come back as long as he pays her well. She's gone home to her folks and told them that her income is from some investments that were made here for her. The sly thing!"

Well, Patsy got out after that as soon as possible. There was nothing more to discover; and he had learned just enough to plunge him deeper in the maze than ever!

If Amy Rood was in England, she could not be here, and he could not have met her the night before. And the idea of the boarding-house keeper was that the girl was too fond of the yellow beryl to have given the jewel away.

"Gee!" muttered Patsy. "Am I barking up the wrong tree? Are there more than two of the stones? Moe said he never saw but two, and I'm mighty sure that they are not as common as glass beads. This is a fine report I've got to take back to Nick. What will he say to me?"

Quite involuntarily Patsy took a down-town car, deep in the matter which puzzled him. He had already spent a good part of the day running about—possibly on a wild-goose chase.

"Yet there must be a connection somewhere between this story of Amy Rood and her plucking of the millionaire, and young Strusse's possession of sudden fortune.

"Huh! who is Miss I-don't-care, after all? Can it be possible that she *is* Amy Rood? Has she foolishly come back? Yet the letter received by her friend seems to preclude that. Now, who would know—— Pshaw! Of course. There's Harrity!"

Patsy slapped his leg with sudden decision.

"That's the chap to see next. Certainly. If he's her attorney, and he'll talk, he holds the key to the mystery. Surest thing you know!"

And knowing about where the offices of Gresham, Harrity & Polk were situated, Patsy kept on the car until it reached lower Broadway.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER BLANK WALL.

It was not until Patsy was going up in the elevator to the offices of the great law firm that he bethought him that he might run up against Strusse. And would the fellow remember him from the night before?

The row in the place on Twenty-eighth Street might have made impression enough on the young fellow's mind for Strusse to spot the caller at first sight.

"All according to how drunk he was," muttered Patsy. "And sure, he looked pretty drunk, so he did! How sharp is the guy, anyway? Not very, if what he is doing shows up the full strength of his mind and character!" he added, with a shrug of disgust.

In the outer office of the concern was a white-headed boy guarding the gate. A quick glance assured Patsy that young Strusse was not in sight.

"I want to see one of your bosses, bub," said Patsy.

"Who d'ye want?" snarled the youthful Cerberus.

"Folks usually hafter see Mr. Briggs, anyway. Unless you've got an appointment."

"Narry an appointment. But I want to see Mr. Harrity."

The boy grinned in a most provoking way.

"Is yer eyesight good?" he asked.

"Fair."

"It's gotter be mighty good to see Harrity."

"And why for, ye little scut?" demanded Patsy.

"Because he's out to Californy."

"Whew!"

"It's a long look."

"It is that. And when's he coming back?"

"Not for a couple of months.

"And when did he go?"

"More'n two weeks ago."

"Whew!"

"Youse said that before," said the kid. "Ain't there nothin' else in yer vocabulary?"

"Say! but you're the fresh lad," said Patsy. "I bet they don't pay you for this?"

"Not what I'm worth—no," admitted the boy. "But I don't charge for it when a geezer like youse comes in here and calls me 'bub.'"

"Oh, that's what's eating you, heh?" grunted Patsy.

He pulled out a roll of bills that made the youngster's eyes pop open, and selected a crisp dollar note. This he extended to the youthful guardian of the gate.

"How's that for a salve for your dignity?"

"All right," admitted the other, scrutinizing the note with a wise air. "Youse is entitled to call me 'bub' once more on them terms."

"No. I'll ask you another question. Who does Harrity's private business when he's not here?"

"Wotcher want done?"

"Now, did I say I wanted anything done?"

"Nix."

"Just answer the question."

"Well, if you've got real biz, you'll hafter to see Briggs. But there's a junior clerk that will take any message."

"Who's that?"

"Mr. Strusse."

"Ah!"

"Want to see him?"

"Not anxious to."

"Well, then?"

"I'm all through, my son. You're a good little boy—or will be when they put you into long pants."

"Gee!" snarled the office-boy. "Wait till I answer youse anudder question! A dollar don't pay fer no such insult!"

But Patsy had learned all he wanted to learn under the circumstances, and he slid out. But at the very door he almost ran down Harold Strusse himself.

The junior clerk was coming in from an outside office with a pile of books in his arms. He was a pasty-faced looking fellow, and his dissipations showed plainly in his countenance and carriage.

He looked squarely into Patsy's face. He recognized him on the moment—the young detective was sure of that!

Harold gasped, his jaw dropped, and so did the books he had been carrying! His nerves were evidently all unstrung.

He continued to stare at Patsy, stammering:

"Did—did you want to see me?"

"Not on your life!" returned Patsy, shaking his head, and refusing to show any recognition.

"Ah—I——"

"Forget it, cull!" advised Patsy, brushing by abruptly and plunging into the elevator.

"That settles my doing the shadow act on Master Strusse any further," thought Patsy. "I hope Chick or Ten-Ichi will be on the job at closing-time. It's 'most three now," he added, looking at his watch.

As he stepped out of the door of the building, still with his watch in his hand, he almost collided with a beefy-faced looking fellow, with a stubble of beard on his chin, and roughly dressed, who was slouching along past the doorway.

"How's the time, boss?" asked this rough-looking customer hoarsely.

"Do you want to know to a minute?" asked Patsy, looking at him keenly, and hesitating before he snapped open the case of his watch again.

"Sure I do!"

Patsy told him, and then said, in a low voice:

"On the job?"

"Yep," was the brief response. "Is the kid still up there?"

"Yes. And I ran against him by accident. He looked scared to death. He remembered me from last night."

"Ah!"

"So I'd best leave him to you," said Patsy, passing on.

Only by the prearranged password that Nick Carter and all his assistants well knew would Patsy have recognized Chick.

But Patsy hurried home to report to his chief. He had really done his best; but it looked to the young fellow as though his "best" in this case had been a bad fumble.

When he arrived at the house, Nick was not yet in. Patsy sat around and kicked his heels and worried for a good two hours before his chief came in. When the latter arrived he called Patsy into his office at once.

"Well, what's the good news?"

"Guess I'm a frost, all right," grumbled Patsy. "I got as far off the track to-day as I did last night."

Nick listened to his story, however, without any comment until it was complete. Then he said:

"And you think you're up against a blank wall?"

"Gosh! Do you see a ray of light through it?"

"Perhaps," said Nick Carter, with a smile.

"Just show me, will you, sir?"

"Bad case of opthalma, eh?"

"That's right! I don't see the next move."

"Are you convinced that old Moe told you the truth?"

"Yes."

"And that Cumber told you the truth?"

"Yes."

"And that your lady friend who keeps the boarding house told the truth?"

"See no reason for her lying."

"You think the most of the lying has been done by the lady who now wears the yellow beryl—eh?" laughed Nick.

"Well, I hate to admit it; but I suppose it's so."

"Ah, Patsy, you'll ever let your heart run away with your head. And a pretty girl——"

"Aw, don't rub it in!" begged Patsy ruefully.

"I won't. But I'll give you a pointer. You believe still that the yellow beryl is the connecting link that holds the chain of evidence against Strusse? That solving the mystery of that—and incidentally the mystery of its wearer—will explain the reason for Strusse having a fortune to spend?"

"I still do!" declared Patsy.

"Do this, then: Find the Rood girl's London address and cable her for information regarding the yellow beryl. Assure the return charges. See what she says. Chick

will run down this other girl, if Strusse meets her to-night. We'll know the whole crooked business to-morrow at this time, or——"

"Or what?" gasped Patsy.

"Or else you have really run up against a blank wall—and it will be the first one that I ever saw since I got into this business!" laughed Nick Carter.

CHAPTER XIII.

NICK INTERVIEWS BURTON STRUSSE AGAIN.

It was the evening following those incidents last related. Before the door of Nicholas Carter's residence stood his newest and fastest automobile, with Danny Malony under the wheel. The engine was already chugging away rhythmically, but there was nobody in the car but Danny himself.

In Nick's room at the back of the house, however, the chief detective sat with Patsy and Ten-Ichi. The assistants were in their motoring-coats and caps, and evidently ready for a spin. But Nick was in evening dress, and his inverness lay over a chair where Joseph had left it handily.

"It was not a very important matter, boys," Nick was saying, "but there were several peculiar circumstances connected with it that made the solution of the mystery puzzling.

"And the outcome goes to show how well it is to remember the smallest details, and give each little thing its full weight in judging a matter. And see what a well-trained memory will do, too!

"Patsy hit the nub of the business the moment he saw that yellow beryl, knew that there could be but few such stones in existence, and believed that he had never seen but one before, and, finally, remembered where that had been.

"Now——"

The telephone-bell rang at his hand. He picked up the receiver and put it to his ear.

"Well?

"Yes.

"At once?

"Good!

"Patsy and Ten-Ichi, both!"

Nick wheeled from the instrument and waved his assistants to the door. Both had already arisen, evidently having been waiting for this summons.

"Chick says they're off. By quick work Danny can get you to Macomb's Dam ahead of them. They're aiming in that direction. Harold has got the girl, but they will pick up Rio Mooney thereabout. Chick knows this for a fact."

Patsy waited for no further word. He darted out of the room and down the stairs and was first in the auto and impatient to have Danny start before Ten-Ichi reached the seat.

"Get on, Danny!" exclaimed Patsy. "If you don't head off that automobile I'll punch the thick head of ye!"

"I'll catch it or get us all in the night coort, sor!" declared the chauffeur.

The latter fate came near to being their portion more than twice or thrice during that run. But they reached the bridge, crossed it, and had waited five minutes or more before the machine they were looking for hove in view.

"That's the Strusse bubble. Sure of that I am," declared Patsy. "Now, run ahead—ah!"

His exclamation was called forth by a figure that stepped out from the walk just ahead of them. The man signaled the auto.

"Hello, Harold!" he said.

"Hello, Willie!" returned Patsy, in an affected voice. "Get away, now, you bold, bad highwayman!"

"Aw, rats! I thought you was a friend of mine," growled the man and stepped back to the curb.

"I'm no friend of yours, Rio Mooney," growled Patsy, under his breath. Then to Danny: "Run slow. Here comes Harold."

The other automobile was driven by the son of the millionaire, and there was only the muffled figure of a girl in the seat beside him. The car stopped instantly when the man on the walk hailed it.

"Now!" exclaimed Patsy.

Danny brought their own car to a dead stop. Patsy and Ten-Ichi leaped out and ran back. They arrived abreast of the Strusse car just as Rio Mooney was about to step in.

The girl screamed.

"Harold! Mr. Strusse! you promised you would have nothing more to do with this villain!" she cried.

"Shut up—you!" said Mooney, with an oath.

Patsy bounded forward. His clenched fist caught the man squarely in the mouth, and if not his words, at least

several of his teeth, came near to being knocked down his throat.

"Take that, ye scoundrel!" panted Patsy. "Look out for him, Ten-Ichi!"

He turned swiftly, seized the girl in his arms, and fairly ran with her to the other automobile. But Ten-Ichi had absolutely nothing to do. Rio Mooney was up and running like a scared cat down the road, while Harold Strusse put on speed and darted away in his car.

"Never was such an easy abduction!" crowed Patsy, as he placed Miss I-don't-care safely in the tonneau of their own car.

* * * * * * *

And meanwhile Nick Carter had walked calmly to the fine residence of the director of the Wood Pulp Trust, and sent in his card. Mr. Strusse sent for him to come into the library, and there met him with grim curiosity.

"Ah! an unexpected pleasure," said the millionaire sneeringly, for he hated the detective.

"Not a pleasure," corrected Nick. "At least, not on my part."

"But on mine——"

"Nor on yours."

"No? Seems to me you *did* mention once that you hoped to get me foul—ha, ha!"

"Perhaps I may. But you walk circumspectly, Mr. Strusse. However, all your family are not as wise."

"What the devil do you mean, sir?" demanded Strusse angrily.

"I have come here to tell you that I am in a position to put your son behind the bars. Not that I am going to do so!" added Nick, raising his hand for silence. "But I could do so. However, such an end to our acquaintance would not please me."

"Indeed! And what new escapade is that fool, Harold, in now?" demanded this fond and indulgent father.

"Just at present, if all accounts are true, he is a party to an abduction. He and a well-known crook about town had planned to carry off a young and innocent girl that your son first befriended, and then deluded into believing he was a man of honor."

"Ha!"

"But I can assure you that the abduction did not come off. Your son has been playing the high-roller of late; but my assistant, Patsy, has brought him to book."

"He can't have been much of a high-roller on fifty a month," growled Strusse.

"He has had other funds."

"What funds?" demanded the other sharply.

"Why, it seems that some three weeks ago Mr. Harrity, whose personal clerk your son is, went away. The very day he departed a package came to the office for him from a client—an actress who has cut something of a dash on Broadway for some months, and finally managed to rope in a rich man to—probably—a pretty tune. She has gone home to England to 'live respectable,' as they put it, and she dared not carry with her the presents this man made her. Harrity was her lawyer. She left the jewelry and certain stocks with him at the moment of the steamship's sailing.

"Mr. Harrity was not expecting the trust. He knew nothing about it. He had already gone to the Pacific coast for an extended stay.

"The packet of valuables was handed directly to your son. He broke the seal, read the letter, knew that Harrity was not informed of the matter, and—used the valuables."

"The young dog!" burst forth Burton Strusse.

"Isn't he?" returned Carter coolly.

"Well, I suppose you want to be bought off?" sneered the millionaire.

"Certainly. You cannot get me angry a second time in the same way, Mr. Strusse. I want to be bought off. You have got to redeem the stock he sold and the jewels he pawned. I will see to getting back the only jewel he gave away.

"But I'd like to have you know just how much of a cad your son is, Mr. Strusse. And good reason. A man who will do what you have done in regard to your ward's supposed lover should naturally be the father of a son like Harold Strusse.

"Fortunately, Patsy met the young and innocent girl whom your son had carried off before it was too late. And, sir," added Nick Carter, rising and shaking his finger in the millionaire's face, "if I ever hear of that boy trying to find, or speak to, or otherwise bothering that little girl again, I'll put him away, whether or no! Do you understand me, Mr. Strusse?"

Mr. Burton Strusse, director of the Wood Pulp Trust, looked as though he did. But he made no comment as Nick Carter drew his coat about him again and walked from the house.

THE END.

The next number (576) will be "The Dead Man on the Roof; or, Nick Carter Clears an Honored Name."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

A hunter who has had much experience among large game in Africa, says:

"I would sooner meet two lions than one rhinoceros, for I know of no wild animal so thoroughly bad-tempered as the latter.

I was riding once with a party of native servants through Abyssinia. We came to a large tract of high, withered grass and thorn-bush. Suddenly we came upon the trail of a rhinoceros. The ground was bad for hunting, for large, disjointed masses of stone concealed in the grass impeded the horses.

We were just speculating as to the position of the rhinoceros, and thinking how uncommonly unpleasant it would be should he obtain our wind, when whiff! whiff! whiff! we heard the sharp, whistling snort, with a tremendous rush through the high grass and thorns close to us; and at the same moment two of these determined brutes were upon us in full charge.

I never saw such a scrimmage; it was each for himself. There was no time for more than one look behind. I dug the spurs in my horse's flanks, and, clasping him round the neck, I ducked my head, well protected with my strong hunting-cap, down to his shoulder, and kept the spurs going as hard as I could ply them. Trusting to Providence and my good horse, I plunged over big rocks, fallen trees, thick thorns, and through grass ten feet high, with the two horrible animals in full chase only a few feet behind me.

I heard their abominable grunting close to me, but I had no need to encourage my horse, which flew over obstacles in a way I shouldn't have thought possible. My servants were scattered everywhere; my horse-keeper had been stunned by a rhinoceros; all the men were sprawling on the rocks trying to hide themselves, and the party was entirely discomfited.

It was in vain that I tried to get my horse's head round and give chase; the wonder was that the scared animal escaped with his life in ground so difficult for riding.

Although my clothes were of the strongest and coarsest Arab cotton cloth, which seldom tore, but simply lost a thread when caught in a thorn, I was nearly naked. My blouse was reduced to shreds. As I wore sleeves only halfway from the shoulder to the elbow, my bared arms were streaming with blood.

Fortunately, my cap was secured by a chin-strap, and, still more fortunately, I had grasped the horse's neck, otherwise I must have been dragged out of the saddle by the hooked thorns. By the time we had got clear of the brutes, all the men were cut and bruised, some having fallen upon their heads among the rocks, and others having broken their arms and legs in their frantic struggles to escape from the dangerous brutes.

DUEL ON THE SAND-BAR.

BY JOHN PHILIP.

Many years ago, when I was a young man, I arrived at Vicksburg on my way to Natchez, where I was to meet Raoul, and the Six Brothers, who, after having hunted and trapped from the head of Grand Lake through the Indian country and the States to St. Louis, were now on their way down the river. They had been gone nearly six months. The first news I had received of their whereabouts was from Jacques Chartica, who had left them at St. Charles. By him Raoul had sent to me the tidings of their doings and destination, with the request that I would meet them at Natchez on the hill, where they expected to be some time in May. This was according to an agreement made previous to starting, that I should, if possible, join them somewhere on the trail, if I got word from him of their route. It was the first time in fifteen years that he had gone out on the winter hunt unaccompanied by me. For fifteen years we had been like brothers.

When the word reached me, I was on the Saguenay paddling homeward. I turned the head of my canoe to the south. If Raoul had sent for me from the other side of the world I should have gone.

In thirteen days I reached Vicksburg. There were no railroads through the West then. At Vicksburg I looked round to see if there was any one whom I knew. Raoul and I had been down the Mississippi before. I fell in with a hunter of the Arkansas territory named Richards. Incidentally, I mentioned to him my errand, and whom I sought. He told me that he had met the whole party farther up the river, near the State line, and still apparently going northward. I was astonished. What were they doing up the river, two hundred miles from where I expected to meet them? That night I rested at Vicksburg, and in the morning followed after them. I had to travel up as far as the mouth of the Arkansas before I overtook them. They were staying at a tavern there on the right bank of the river, kept by a Scotchman from the provinces, named Pete Dunkin. I had known him before, when he lived on the Lake St. John, and owned a tavern there called the "Three Trees." The place he had now was a low one-story shanty, built of logs, and stood by itself, three or four miles from any other dwelling. It was a great resort for

boatmen, gamblers, raftsmen, and all that class of characters, who lived and moved upon the river—and was known as "Pete Dunkin's house."

There I found Raoul and his party, all well and all together. They were boisterously glad to see me. Raoul was not as noisy as the others. It was not his manner; but, apart from that, I detected in his silence something unusual; and, as soon as I could get free from the Montagnacs, I approached and questioned him. We had no secrets from each other.

"Raoul," I asked, "what brings you here? Have you been to Natchez? Why did you not write to me?"

He leaned forward and answered me in two words:

"Alex Balatier!"

I understood him—it is too long a story to tell now; but it meant vengeance! I motioned toward the brothers.

"They would not leave me," he said. "I would much rather have come alone. They know nothing of the matter."

He shrugged his shoulders. It was *"Voila a Dieu,"* as we say in the provinces.

"Will he be here?" I inquired.

"I am waiting for him," he replied.

He unbound from his wrist a deerskin pouch, and handed it to me.

"You will take charge of this, now that you are here," he said. "It is the money we got at St. Louis."

I took it, and we rejoined the brothers.

These Six Brothers were six giants. No half-dozen men in the lower province could stand against them. Mighty hunters and trappers were they, and great among those who had fought in the wars with the Indians. Pierre, Rubel, Aloise, Gaston, Chancy, and Antoine Montagnac were they called. They were always together; they dressed and looked alike. What one did the others followed. At home we called them *"Les Freres Junius,* the Twins." Rubel was the smallest among them; he stood six feet and one inch, and once had killed a black bear on the Abbitibbee in single combat, with no other weapon than his knife. Yet, to Raoul Papporn, these counted themselves only as children. Where could you find a man like him? He lacked barely three inches of seven feet, and carried the strength of three men in his sinews. At wrestling, rifle-shooting, leaping, lifting, or hurling, none dared compete with him. Yet, withal, he was as generous as a king and as gentle as a child, not easily roused to wrath; but to anger him!—to anger him was terrible!

The brothers, when we rejoined them, began talking all together. They told me of their route, their adventures, their success, and the unexpected prices they had obtained—all was excellent. Then we filled our glasses and drank to each other and to home—we sang, we shouted, we roared until the roof of the shanty trembled.

Presently a noise outside announced some newcomers. Raoul glanced at me. This, perhaps, was him. A moment more the door was pushed open, with an oath, and a tall, bulky form entered at last—the man we were waiting for. He was not alone; eight others accompanied him, all river men. Of these I recognized but one—"Buff Grant" he was called, a gambler and desperado, well known in every low tavern along the Mississippi, from Cairo to New Orleans.

Balatier looked round the room as he entered. The Montagnacs were strangers to him. Raoul sat in a corner, hidden by the shadows of the rafters. I was leaning back against the wall, as if asleep, with my cap drawn over my eyes. There was one whom we knew.

They soon settled themselves at another table. Cards were produced, and liquor called for. Meanwhile the singing and playing, momentarily interrupted among our party by their entrance, went on as before. Presently Grant looked toward us.

"Who'll take a hand in over here?" he asked.

At this invitation, Raoul arose and came forward.

"I will," he said.

"And I," said Pierre.

"And I, and I," repeated the others, following suit, as usual.

I did not move. My regards were fixed upon Balatier. At the sight of Raoul, and upon hearing his voice, I thought he would have fallen from his seat. His purple, freckled face grew of a dusky, livid paleness; his mouth remained open, as if he were gasping for breath. The glass he was about to raise to his lips he clutched with such convulsive tightness that it broke in his fingers.

There was some little confusion as they shifted their places to accommodate the newcomers. When it had subsided, I beheld Raoul seated at the farther end of the table, with Grant on his right, a heavy, dull-looking boatman on his left, Balatier opposite. Without appearing to notice any one in particular, he took the cards as they were handed to him, and commenced to shuffle and deal. The play began, and for a long time continued, marked only by the usual accompaniments of betting, swearing, calling out the hands, the rattling of money, the curses of the losers, and the exultant exclamations of those who won.

Gradually Balatier seemed to recover from the shock caused by Raoul's sudden appearance; perhaps he fancied, from the latter's behavior, that he had not recognized him. Yet he was not altogether at his ease; every now and then he would cast across the table a rapid, furtive glance, when he was not playing; his fingers clutched nervously at the edges of the table, or plucked impatiently at his beard, and he shuffled his feet restlessly from side to side. Doubtless he had not yet forgotten that other night, when four men sat gambling together, and three only remained to reckon up the game.

As for Raoul, he did not utter a word; his playing was all done by nods and gestures. In the intervals of the game he rested his arms upon the table and beat time softly to the *chanson* that Gaston sang, or, rather, shouted. To look at him as he rapidly and carelessly shuffled and dealt out the cards, as he silently and indifferently played his game, and paid over his losses or took in his gains, a stranger, or one unacquainted with his character, would have said he did it all for pastime, or in good-natured acquiescence, without noticing or caring whether he lost or won, or was fairly used or not. I knew him better! Not the slightest movement on either side escaped him; his silence and apparent carelessness told me clearer than words—the terrible intensity of his emotions—it was concentration, not indifference. In times of great danger and excitement he seemed to forget the faculty of speech and harden into marble; his eyes alone, if you could look into their depths, would betray that he saw or heard, or felt at all; inwardly he gathered himself together. This was the most terrible height of his anger and determination. His si-

lence, to those who understood it, was more awful than the fiercest rage of other men.

Raoul played still. I began to wonder at his patience. How much longer could he hide the fire that burned within him? Yet outwardly he remained as at the commencement. Balatier, on the other hand, showed increasing uneasiness. The sweat rolled off his temples in large drops; his lips worked incessantly; he felt like a rat that the presence of a savage and powerful dog forces into a corner from which there is no escape. At this moment his enemy does not notice him or seem to be aware of his vicinity; but wait a little—he will scent, he will growl, he will spring, and there will be an end of it. Once or twice he put his hand to the back of his neck, but each of these times Raoul, as if by accident, looked toward him, and he dropped it again to the table. Meanwhile Raoul had ceased to win, and his pile was rapidly diminishing. He glanced at it and at the others; pushed it forward; "he staked it"; spread open his hand; he "called." The other showed up.

"Two pair, I crow," exclaimed Balatier.

Quick as a flash Raoul stretched across the board and seized him by the wrist.

"You lie!" he hissed. "There are cards up your sleeve!"

Every one sprang to their feet. Sixteen knives flashed from their sheaths. The game was over, but this was what he had played for. We rushed pell-mell together; the tables and benches were hurled out of the way; one of them struck the lamp; it fell to the floor and was extinguished. Then we saw that it was already day. The gray streaks of morning shone in through the windows and chinks of the building.

"The bar! the bar!" cried some one. "The tide is out—let us go down there."

At this proposition we made for the door. I followed close upon Raoul; he turned round and caught both my hands in his.

"Jean," he said, "you will not mix in. You will not fight? Promise me—swear!

"Who will comfort Rosita and the children if I fall? Who will carry that home to them?"—he touched the pouch with his finger. "Promise me!"

"*Voila a Dieu!*" I answered. "It will be as God wills!"

He wrung my hands, and we hastened after the others. The road to the bar was by a sloping path to the left. A bluff about thirty feet in height and two hundred yards from the tavern overlooked it. Thither I went. Dunkin, also, with the rest belonging to the house, stood there. As one by one the combatants reached the spot, each man threw off his coat, tightened his belt around him, drew his cap more firmly down on his head, and with his knife in his hand, looked round for an adversary. There were nine to seven, but among the seven was Raoul. The Six Brothers were no infants, but their opponents were men who had made murder an amusement.

Against Raoul three opposed themselves. They were the same three who had gambled with him—Alex Balatier, Buff Grant, and the boatman. He advanced a step and stumbled—it was a feint. The three rushed upon him; with a blow from his left hand he sent the gambler reeling to the ground. The boatman, stooping forward, received the knife up to its hilt in his stomach. Uttering a horrible cry, he turned half-around, and fell flat upon the sand. A stab that Balatier aimed at him Raoul caught upon his arm; it ripped the sleeve and glanced off hurtless upon his breast.

Up and down and in and out, backward and forward, to and fro. They do not cut and stab only—they bite, they gouge, they kick, they strike, they tear, they struggle. They are no longer men—they are wild beasts. My blood begins to tingle, and my breath to shorten. There is a noise in my ears like the sound of falling waters.

But Raoul—where is he? Him I have constantly looked for; the rest I have seen only incidentally. Him there can be no mistaking; he towers a head above the others, and is always in the center of the fight. See, he goes down! No! He is up again. As he rises, he shakes his head like a diver who emerges from the water. He has a man in his arms. His reddened knife he holds between his teeth. His long hair and beard are dripping with blood. Three times he goes down and three times reappears thus. At the first time I throw off my coat, and let it fall beside me. At the second, I tighten my belt around me, and loosen my knife in its sheath. The third, I hand the deer-skin pouch to Dunkin, and leap down upon the bar. I alight upon my hands and knees. Arising, I catch sight of Raoul's face. His eyes sparkle like a wolf's in the dark. Gaston sees me also as he stoops to avoid a blow, and with an upward thrust buries his blade in the assailant's breast.

"*A bas! a bas!*" he shouts.

He fights with his left hand—his right hangs useless by his side. Near me lie three men with their faces to the sand. One of them is Antoine. Another—it is the gambler—staggers out from the crowd, bleeding, and blinded from a score of cuts, wildly throwing his arms about. He reels and totters to the ground, and with a gurgling curse rolls over and is still. Among those who yet fight there remains not one unwounded. Such are the duels of the men of the Mississippi, and of the Northwest; nor ended with the first scratch, or with first blood. They fight until they die—you conquer when you have slain them.

I meet Balatier.

"*Sacre!*" he exclaims; "and you, too!"

I press after him into the mêlée. Two steps, and my knife is wet.

"*Merci!*" murmurs Rubel hoarsely.

Another step, and a pang keen and cold as ice pierces my side; but just in front of me is Alex Balatier, and a little farther off is Raoul, who, making his way toward us, flings on one side, like boys, all who oppose him.

I go down to the edge of the advancing tide, and plunge my head in. Ugh! how cool it is! I burn all over like one in a fever. I turn round to count how many remain alive. Out of the seventeen, four beside myself dip their heads in the water. They are Raoul, Gaston, Rubel, and Pierre. Gaston's right hand is nearly severed from his wrist; Pierre has a gash that extends from beneath his left eye to the corner of his mouth; Rubel stanches with his shirt the blood that flows from three deep incisions in his breast and shoulder. I carry about me a scar four inches long, from the lower rib to the hip; Raoul bleeds from thirteen wounds. All the strangers are dead; topmost in a heap lies Alex Balatier, his throat slit from one ear to the other, so that his head hanging down, the top of it touches the ground.

In the afternoon we buried the three brothers, and seven days afterward were on our way home.

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